

**THE ROLE OF REACHING DIASPORA PEOPLES TO
TURN AROUND A DECLINING DENOMINATIONAL
CHURCH IN A TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD**

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PAUL LAWRENCE

MAY 2007

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I will build My Church

–Matthew 16:18

After these things I looked and, behold a great multitude which no one could number, of
all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb
clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands

–Revelation 7:9

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations

–Mark 11:17

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|------|
| LIST OF TABLES | vi |
| LIST OF DIAGRAMS..... | vii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | viii |
| ABSTRACT | x |

PART 1: CLARIFICATION

Chapter

| | | |
|------------|---|----|
| ONE | INTRODUCTION..... | 2 |
| TWO | IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF ITS COMMUNITY ON MOUNT PLEASANT BAPTIST CHURCH..... | 18 |

PART 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION

| | | |
|--------------|--|-----|
| THREE | CONCEPTUALIZATION THROUGH LITERATURE REVIEW: THE PRIMARY MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN RECONCILING ITS COMMUNITY TO THE WORLD AND TO GOD..... | 50 |
| FOUR | ENGAGING IN A MISSION OF RECONCILIATION TO WORK TOWARD AN INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY OF MULTINATIONAL CONGREGATION AND RECONCILIATION..... | 93 |
| FIVE | METHODOLOGY OF APPROACH TO DETERMINE RECONCILIATORY PRACTICES THROUGH SYSTEMS LEARNING | 156 |

PART 3: CONFRONTATION

| | | |
|------------|--|-----|
| SIX | PRACTICAL STEPS FOR THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA PEOPLE IN TURNING AROUND A DECLINING DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH BY MAKING THE CONNECTION TO THE TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD..... | 199 |
|------------|--|-----|

APPENDIX

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | SAMPLE JOB POSTINGS WITH BILINGUAL REQUIREMENTS..... | 227 |
| 2 | AN INTRODUCTION TO PRIMARY & SECONDARY CULTURE..... | 229 |
| 3 | EVALUATION FORM | 230 |
| 4 | ABC/USA BAPTISM..... | 231 |
| 5 | CHURCH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, ABC/USA..... | 232 |

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 233 |
|--------------------|-----|

| | |
|------------|-----|
| VITA | 237 |
|------------|-----|

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Population, 2000 | 29 |
| 2. Race, 2000..... | 30 |
| 3. Mount Pleasant Race and Ethnicity | 31 |
| 4. Births by Race and Ethnicity, Mount Pleasant | 32 |
| 5. Primary Language of Public School Students..... | 33 |
| 6. Racial Breakdown of Students..... | 34 |
| 7. Place of Birth of Students in Providence Public Schools | 34 |
| 8. Where Jobs are in Rhode Island | 35 |
| 9. Trend in Number of Churches by Ethnicity for ABC/USA with Projection for Year 2000..... | 147 |
| 10. Hexagon Responses to the Question, “How can Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Turn around in this Transitional Neighborhood?”..... | 177 |
| 11. Hexagon Clusters in Answer to the Question: “What is the role of reaching the Diaspora people, to turn around Mount Pleasant Baptist Church..... | 179 |
| 12. Segmented Evaluation Results..... | 213 |
| 13. Mentor Evaluation..... | 215 |

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

| Diagram | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Initial Causal Loop | 180 |
| 2. Dynamics of Visionary Prayer and Leadership learning..... | 181 |
| 3. Dynamics of Visionary Prayer and Proclamation..... | 182 |
| 4. Dynamics of Proclamation and Community Connection..... | 183 |
| 5. Dynamics of Combination of Entities..... | 184 |
| 6. Reinforcing and Balancing Loop..... | 185 |
| 7. Hexagon Dynamics | 188 |
| 8. Visionary Prayer affects Leadership learning | 191 |
| 9. Promoting God’s love to Diaspora people..... | 192 |
| 10. Lack of Visionary Prayer | 193 |
| 11. Vitality of the System (Soul-winning Model) | 194 |
| 12. Hermeneutic Circle | 196 |
| 13. Vision to build and build to win! | 217 |
| 14. Organizational Change Process..... | 224 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is because of the leading of the glorious Spirit of God that I have been able to accomplish this time-consuming project. I am indebted to Janet, my wife for her valuable help and encouragement to study at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The Holy Spirit led me to her and she has been my best companion. She critiqued me to get the project done on time. Also, the Spirit of God led me to Mount Pleasant Baptist Church where I have been the pastor since 2004. The church has helped me with encouragement, prayers and financial support. I offer my sincerest and profoundest gratitude to the church family.

Every professor who taught my classes at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary at CUME has contributed in some way to this project, both directly and indirectly. Dr. Doug and Judy Hall have made the greatest impact for the success of this project. All that I have learned from them will inform my life and, ministry from a systemic, spiritual and social perspective of the church in relation to the Kingdom of God. Dr. Gregg Detwiler, one of my readers, must be acknowledged as well. He, along with Doug and Judy, gave me insight into the importance of the topic and of writing an effective thesis. Cherry Gorton (Librarian at CUME) and Sister Eileen Good (nun at the Congregation of Notre Dame, Providence, RI.) spent much time in proof reading and making valuable comments. My sincerest appreciation goes to each of them.

The learning teams of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Trinity Covenant Christian Church (Manchester, CT.), The First Congregational Church of Hebron (Hebron, CT.) and The First Congregational Church, (Revere, MA) helped greatly to inform this project. Rev. Swensen and Rev. Granitsas are indispensable in their encouragement and help. Dr.

Eldin Villafane's courses, lectures, and conversations led to a clear understanding of Christian social ethics which have influenced my thinking toward a more positive, biblical and hermeneutic philosophy. I may have missed acknowledging those who should be included but are not. To all those who are acknowledged and unacknowledged who have encouraged me and informed this project, I offer my deepest appreciation.

ABSTRACT

The following thesis is a systemic view of how the role of the Diaspora peoples can turn around a declining denominational church in a transitional neighborhood. Foundational problems have contributed to the gradual decline of the Christian Church both at the denominational and non-denominational levels in America. The Macro Cosmic View of the Kingdom Church as seen by the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation 7: 9 must be viewed at the Micro Cosmic Level through the local church. The declining denominational church has to get reconciled to God and become ambassadors to get the world reconciled to Him.

Dr. Eldin Villafañe's "Hermeneutic Circle" Paradigm provides the framework for this project. The three steps of the, "Hermeneutic Circle," (1) Clarification, (2) Conceptualization, and (3) Confrontation provide a systemic look at social ethics. The Clarification step is found in the Introduction (Chapter One) and Chapter Two where we attempt to delve deeper into facts relating to what is really happening. The Conceptualization process in Chapters Three, Four and Five provides an opportunity to comprehend what the Bible and other pertinent literature say about the topic. Chapter Six deals with Confrontation, and is where we determine the redemptive action for solving the problem.

This thesis shows the connection between certain systemic and dysfunctional aspects of the denominational church and the transitional neighborhood. The goal of this project is to get the "mental models" of the declining church modeled upon the redemptive track of reconciliation to God and the world.

PART 1: CLARIFICATION

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Becoming extinct or distinct because of change!

Corporations, communities, and other entities are in a state of consistent change in the United States, and congregations are not an exception. It is very crucial to be vigilant and observe constantly the subtleties of change. Leading indicators of change can be missed and can be very detrimental to organizations. Some organizations can become extinct or distinct because of change. Extinction does not happen overnight because, the declining process has been happening gradually over a long period of time and all the warning signals have been ignored. A frog thrown into a vessel containing boiled water would leap out instantly but not out of lukewarm water. The frog would enjoy staying in the lukewarm water if the water temperature increases gradually until the frog gets used to the changing temperature, and before it is too late the frog gets cooked inadvertently as the water reaches its boiling point.

IBM in the eighties lost its gigantic image because of three problems of conceit, complacency and conservatism when the rivals Microsoft and Intel took advantage of the sleeping giant. IBM had been suffering from what could be characterized as boiled frog syndrome before the nightmare shook the company like the earth quake/Tsunami hit the Banda Aceh region in Indonesia in 2005. This boiled frog syndrome caught IBM off guard, and even after a couple of decades IBM still has not been able to recapture the loftiest position it had once enjoyed.

Swiss watches had indomitable popularity and mastery based on the main spring which the Swiss had invented and their market domination was felt around the world.

They came up with the new innovative electronic technology to replace the main spring watches but the upper level management just like that of IBM declined the proposal to introduce the new modern electronics. The conservative and conceited management felt that no one could beat them. Their complacency soon became evident when the Japanese took the new technology of the Swiss and introduced new electronically designed watches to meet the new demand of the modern world.

The acclaimed quality guru Edward Deming, came up with the new technology for the automobile industry a few decades ago based on total quality management, but was rejected in America. TQM stands for Total Quality Management. It is a quality control concept to inculcate employees with quality values throughout the firm in every activity, with frontline workers totally involved in the process. This concept focuses on managing the entire organization to deliver quality to customers. Four significant elements of TQM are employee empowerment, customer focus, bench marking, (comparing and learning from other companies) and continuous improvement. The Japanese took the same TQM philosophy in the manufacturing of the automobiles and stole much of the world market share while meeting the new demands (caused by fuel shortages) of the motorists to drive fuel efficient and quality based automobiles in the seventies and eighties. The giant auto manufacturers were puzzled and did not even realize that conceit and complacency on their part had worked against them and that they had failed to meet the changing needs of the motorists around the world. There are a few other firms like Xerox and Nucor which have had this boiled frog syndrome and suffered heavy losses to the point of extinction but they reinvented themselves to be on the right track.

The Purpose of this Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how denominations/churches can ignore the leading indicators of change, and become extinct completely, instead of becoming distinct by proactively perceiving the environment and adapting to change accordingly. My total intent is to explore the imperative of personal evangelism and other ways of making the church relevant to the people coming to the transitional neighborhood. Churches can suffer from the boiled frog syndrome until they go into extinction if they cannot discern the times and the needs of people, and fail to guard against conservatism, conceit and complacency. The objective of doing any secular business is to meet the business needs of people, just like the objective of the church is to meet the spiritual needs of people. When either fails to do this, businesses shut their operation and churches become extinct. Complacency, conceit and conservatism of Christians in England and South Africa brought dismay, disappointment and dejection to Mahathma Gandhi who had been seeking the truth but kept often encountering conceited Christians who failed to help him. Because of this Gandhi could not adopt Christianity as a major force for individual transformation.¹ Gandhi took a neutral stand to spiritual transformation leaving millions of Indians in heathen darkness for decades to follow.

The American Baptist denomination is in a similar predicament. Some seminaries from where graduates are hired to the ministry of the American Baptist churches as pastors are very liberal in their interpretation of the Scripture. Secular humanism, relativism, agnosticism etc have slowly crept in.

¹ Yogesh Chada , *Gandhi - A life*, (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.,1997), 57-60.

The denomination did not see this problem thirty years ago. Total number of baptisms in 1970 was 35,546 as opposed to 60,763 in 1950. (Appendix 4) It is a 43% drop in 20 years. According to the denominational polity, only regenerated and baptized believers ought to be admitted to membership. This 43% drop should have shocked the leadership but it did not. In 2000 the total number of baptisms declined to 17,567 with a drop of 16,979 (49%). It has been corporate complacency. The upper level management has had a boiled frog syndrome all these years without seeing the seriousness of the decline in membership. Conservatism, complacency and conceit cause decline for an organization in the light of the changing world. The denomination emphasizes conservatism as far as the form of worship, congregationalism and infrastructure is concerned, but theologically it is heading toward the liberal side. The denomination can turnaround and regain the lost strength.

Churches within the American Baptist denomination rarely change to keep up with the times and need. Conservatively-observed methodology of worship with specific adherence to one-hour church services has neither attracted young people to church in the past nor today. Change is great but it is only for others, has been the general attitude. People feel there is an enemy out there pointing to the demographical changes, globalization, economics and every other factor, but they do not want to accept the fact that there has been complacency, and negligence in accepting adaptability to change. Some denominational and church leaders keep wondering who the enemy really is.

Peter Senge points out that statements made referring to the enemy, “out there” and “in here” are usually part of a single system. We have a learning disability that makes it almost impossible to detect the leverage which we can use “in here” on problems that

straddle the boundary between us and “out there.” While understanding the structures of a firm or any system it is possible to understand its behavior thereby learning to change that behavior in such a way that it influences and changes the larger system. Peter Senge reiterates Walt Kelly’s famous line from Pogo: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”²

God’s Spirit is deliberately ignored in most American Baptist church services in which a program-oriented style of hymn-singing (dry ones), formative preaching (not based on the Word of God) etc. is dominant. Some of the most beautiful and inspiring hymns are not deliberately sung during the services in most of the churches. In some churches the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is not mentioned and God is substituted.

In light of the sea change which has been happening in the American Baptist denomination and its churches, and in light of the dynamics and opportunities in mission and ministry at Mount Pleasant, we will undertake in this thesis to accomplish three objectives: (1) To analyze the “social ecology” of the people at and around the region of Mount Pleasant, Providence, Rhode Island. The reason for this undertaking is that we need to understand the diversities of people living at Mount Pleasant, and the influence that they have upon the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. (2) To reflect on the mission and ministry in and through a Euro-American majority congregation in this neighborhood. To achieve this objective we will use the case study method, intense interviews at both individual and group levels, and questionnaire. Reflection from systems thinking, theology and literature will be made comprehensively, and intertwined to achieve our objective. (3) To look for principles that could be used by other (denominational) churches for their own growth, and

² Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline (The Art and the Practice of the Learning Organization)*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 20-54.

to encourage them in their outreach programs to their communities in the region and beyond. It is our responsibility to inform and help other denominations and non-denominational congregations that they may observe and discover principles in similar or other ministerial environments.

The Research Questions

The research questions that may be investigated in this thesis-project may be categorized as follows:

Primary Research Question (Chapter Six): How to revitalize the declining denominational church and turn it around by reaching the Diaspora people, toward a dynamic multicultural church, such as Mount Pleasant Baptist Church (here after referred to as MPBC) by accepting the challenge 1) to explore the strategic revelation of the church, 2) to establish visionary prayer 3) to identify, appoint and empower leaders of continuous learning, and 4) to practically proclaim and research what is actually working in the community to reach the lost for the Kingdom of God?

Secondary Research Questions

1. **SOCIAL ECOLOGY** (Chapter Two): What is the, “social ecology” of the presence of Euro-Americans and people of all other ethnicities at Mount Pleasant, Rhode Island, and what impact does it have on the Christian church? The church needs to interrelate with the social ecology of its community without which its mission becomes inappropriate. The community context decides its extinction or distinction.
2. **LITERATURE REVIEW** (Chapter Three): What does the current literature speak about issues that the church should address in its ministry and mission to or with Diaspora people? Books *Exclusion and Embrace* by Miroslav Volf, *Churches, Cities and Human*

Community edited by Clifford Green, *Christ and Culture* by Richard Niebuhr, *City of God* by Robert Linthicum, *Missionary Methods* by Roland Allen, *People of the Dream* by Michael O. Emerson, *Breakout Churches* by Thom S. Rainer, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap....and Others Don't* by Jim Collins, and will be used as reference. *The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Business Organization* by Peter Senge will be examined for systemic analysis of the problem. *Urban Ministry* by Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, and *Seek the Peace of the City* by Eldin Villafañe will be also used as reference.

3. THEOLOGY (Chapter Four): What principles of theology can we draw from the Bible relating to ministry and mission to people in a changing neighborhood?
4. PROJECT DESIGN and INITIAL LEARNING (Chapter Five): What methodologies and principles can be utilized to comprehend the dynamics and opportunities of the Christian church in its ministry and mission to people in the neighborhood and beyond? What are the lessons that we have learned from the three churches as, “learning teams” in their mission and ministry through using these methods and tools?
5. OUTCOMES/IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE (Chapter Six): How can ministry and mission are nurtured and cultivated effectively in and through a Euro-American church, such as MPBC and turn it around from declining?

The Assumptions

The following presuppositions are assumed in this thesis-project:

1. **Social analysis** of communities helps us fundamentally to understand the scope of the church's ministry and mission. Evangelicals believe in the primacy of the Bible as the

Word of God but neglect to discover the assumptions and implications in it. Social analysis helps us to obtain an informed position while enlightening us to ask the fundamental and right questions. It is a tool to see clearly that which is hidden.

2. **Scripture** is the foundation and authority in all things. Ministry and mission should be biblically-based without which they are like houses built on the sand and not on the solid rock. Ministerial practices can be faulty and it is our assumption that they can be partially or fully deficient without a solid theological basis.

3. **Systems thinking** is a truth not only evident in nature but in Scripture as well. Reality is seen in natural sciences from a systems perspective and it can be seen in the Bible from the systems view point. There is a harmonious interconnectedness of reality in Creation, the Fall and Redemption. Ecologically speaking there is connection among social, spiritual and material realities. The harmonious link that existed between God and human beings has been disconnected. Also, the same harmony between God and environment has been cut off, and the earth is cursed. The systemic connection with God, mankind and nature can be restored only through redemption. The Resurrected Redeemer removes all these separations between God and mankind, and mankind and environment through his sacrificial atonement on the cross. The doctrines of Creation, the Fall and Redemption can be seen from a systems perspective, and this same reality is evident in the environment.

4. **Systems thinking** from a Christian perspective is our objective and goal. Social reality is seen in the secular discipline of systems thinking but God's people have to see beyond the utilitarian perspective of systems thinking. Secular discipline of systems thinking and Christian systems have to be aligned to see the larger picture from God's

point of view. Dr. Douglas Hall speaks of doing systemic theology in ministry and mission of the church. Social dimensions of reality are limited but when they are intertwined with the spiritual dimensions of reality as revealed in the Scripture and in Christ, the big picture emerges.

Parameters of the Thesis

The following delimitations are noticeable in this project:

1. **Demographic Data:** The public release of the 2000 census data was the only available data at the time of the writing of this project. Reliance on the community analysis of Mount Pleasant as of 2000 data misses the most recent demographic development in this region. There are several subcategories of “Hispanic ethnicity” living at Mount Pleasant and the statistics of people who have moved from other countries recently have to be different taking into consideration a few thousand people who have been numerically added to the population.

2. **Ecological Observations:** Ecological observance of the displaced people living in this location and their influence on host people, economy and institutions is not scientifically accurate. The influence of the Diaspora people on the host community can be very subtle to interpret.

3. **Three churches:** We have to limit our investigation of the ministry and mission of the churches at Manchester and Hebron, Connecticut, and Revere, Massachusetts because of the fact that it is impossible to cover many other dying churches that have turned around. Also, Rev. Swensen who has been instrumental in turning around the churches at Manchester and Hebron, Connecticut has used the same principles which he has used in two other churches in Ohio and Illinois.

Definition of Terms

The terminology used in this thesis-project will be explained in details as the project progresses. The following list is designed to give some initial understanding of the concepts and the terms discussed in this thesis.

Diaspora: This is a Greek word used numerously in the New Testament to describe the scattered Jewish people. They were the Jewish Diaspora similar to the first generation of American immigrants who have left their countries of origin because of force or choice. The term is now used to refer sociologically and demographically to the Asian Diaspora, the African Diaspora etc.

Social Ecology: Social Ecology refers to the science of relationships which exist between organisms and their environments. Social Ecology of Diaspora or displaced people in the USA describe the influence of the immigrants with the people, culture, economy and institutions of their new homeland.

Euro-American: Euro-American is commonly used to refer to the term, Anglo.

Systems thinking: Systems thinking is a discipline which deals with the interconnectedness of social reality. It tends to focus on multifarious entities as part of the larger system as opposed to isolated parts of the whole. Peter Senge's The Fifth Discipline is a master piece on systems thinking.

The Methodology

The paradigm of systemic thinking is the, "hermeneutical circle of social ethics," which I will explore relating to its basic steps of (A) Clarification as to what is really happening? (B) Conceptualization as to what do God's Word and relevant disciplines say

about the subject? and (C) Confrontation as to what is the response of God's people? It requires realistically speaking the contextual comprehension of the big picture in the first place.

Clarification

1. I will attempt to clarify not only ministerial issues in this project from a denominational and individual church stand point, but their leading indicators as well simultaneously assessing their paramount significance. Chapter 1 will be included in this part, in which I will analyze the setting in the context of which systematic research takes place historically, statistically, denominationally and demographically. I propose to research, "The role of Diaspora people to turnaround the declining denominational church (Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Providence, Rhode Island) in a transitional neighborhood." Growing out of The First Baptist Association founded in 1707, the American Baptist denomination was reorganized in 1972 as American Baptist Churches, USA to reemphasize the congregation-centered mission of the denomination. MPBC which is a member of the ABC, USA had its humble origin in cottage prayer meetings in 1868, and it has been in existence for the past 123 years in this changing neighborhood of the city of Providence

A case study of The Trinity Covenant Church, Manchester, The First Congregation Church of Hebron, Hebron, Connecticut, and The First Congregational Church, Revere, Massachusetts will be made to point out systemic and structural factors or keys that have been in place in these two churches to prevent closure, which in turn could be used by MPBC or any other declining denominational church for a complete turn around. This case study will be part of the Chapter 4 Methodology section.

Rev. Norman Swensen served as the pastor of the Trinity Covenant Church for 25 years.³ But for the effective principles that he formulated and practiced as a team the church could have started on the declining process as many churches did during the last forty years. He formulated a concept of choosing two or three people, “learning teams,” who are aligned to the corporate vision of the church, and training them to win souls. He went with the team to the homes of new visitors to the church and taught them how to do it. Rev. Swensen was enthusiastic in teaching the Word of God and training people in groups of three. He sent them out to contact the visitors promptly and to explain the message of salvation, which resulted in outstanding conversions of unsaved people. The majority of the congregation became soul winners and started different programs to reach the lost with the Gospel. Also, Rev. Swensen served as the interim pastor of the First Congregational Church of Hebron, Connecticut for two years, where he adopted the same principles of the, “learning teams,” He was a powerful coach and showed the people of this church how to bring unsaved people to Christ.⁴ Rev. Nick Granitsas became the pastor of the First Congregational Church at Revere, MA⁵. It had only four people one of whom was his future mother in law, and the church was ready to shut down. God used him to

³ Trinity Covenant Church is a large denominational church located in Manchester, Connecticut. It was established in 1892 by a small group of Christians to minister to the Swedish immigrants in the Manchester area. The Church is affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church which is a rapidly growing multi-ethnic denomination of more than 750 congregations in the United States and Canada with global ministries.

⁴ The First Congregational Church of Hebron, Hebron, Connecticut. This church is a member of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference. (4 C's Churches- Evangelical and fundamental)

⁵ The First Congregational Church was built in 1710 at Revere, MA and the church later joined the Unitarian Denomination in 1828 by rejecting the deity of Christ. Ten faithful members left and started a new Church in different homes and built the present building in 1849. In 2003, the membership was 160. It is a member of the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference.(4C's)

turn the church around to be a model to follow and they are still going on for Jesus just like the New Testament Church.

I am interested in these three churches because they could have experienced the same decline like MPBC in the past 30 years but they did not. They encountered similar problems both systemic and spiritual but with adaptability to change while strictly following the same New Testament model they have successfully 1) resisted the declining phenomena, 2) proved to be what a church really is all about and 3) learned how a church can cautiously change the method of the mission of the church without changing the motivation and message of the church. They looked for new and suitable approaches (like coffee hour groups) in presenting the Gospel (contextualized approach) but preached the unadulterated Word with sincerity. These three churches are primary examples of vitality, vision and vivaciousness, and their efficaciousness is certainly a great model to follow.⁶

Conceptualization

Chapter 3 of this project will be devoted to the review of literature based in which its scholarship and wisdom is scrutinized in a larger context. This is a critical need to prevent and or solve the problems of decaying or dying churches in America or in any industrialized or other nation. A section of this project will deal with literature that pertains to leadership strategies. Books like *Breakout Churches* by Thom S. Rainer and *People of the Dream* by Michael O. Emerson deal with this vital subject relating to turn around strategies from a spiritual stand point. A few notable secular companies like Xerox and Nucor which used turn around strategies will be referenced for systemic knowledge

⁶ The efficaciousness of vitality, vision and vivaciousness of these churches is measured with the yard stick of a) message, b) motivation and c) method.

and corporate culture to be adapted to the spiritual management of the church. Also, *Prophets in the dark: how Xerox reinvented itself and beat back the Japanese* by David T. Kearns will be used as reference in this thesis-project.

My objective is to formulate a plan and prescription to apply a systemic and spiritual solution spiritually, culturally, economically, relationally, politically and organizationally to the systemic and spiritual problems of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church specifically or any other denominational church or a denomination itself in a larger context.

This project is built on the foundational principles of the systemic infrastructure and Chapter 3 will deal with the theological basis and reflection of the integration. This project will be analyzed sociologically, theologically and biblically so as to bring out the essence of the turn around strategic management for God's glory and for the Kingdom of God. The New Testament Church is the best model from a theological, sociological and other stand points to deal with several issues like shalom, kerygma, koinonia, diakonia, leiturgia and others. Their missionary approach to social justice was in conformity to God's justice, and the New Testament pattern has been an excellent example of A) missionary message, B) missionary motivation and C) missionary method despite the fact that change is acceptable to the application of the method depending on sociological and other factors.

Confrontation

Chapter 5 of the project specifically deals with Project Design, the major components of which include application of systemic knowledge, analysis, innovative approaches and special steps in the kingdom direction. Systemic theology is the application of biblical and theological principles. Application of these two steps will concretely result in a holistic strategy for the church or the denomination to turn around and faithfully follow the

direction of the kingdom route. Holistic refers to shalom from the biblical perspective covering all areas of blessing from spiritual, sociological, material and other aspects.

Chapter 5 deals with methodology also, and it will cover hexagoning done extensively at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. Serious interviews, case studies and questionnaires have been conducted at Trinity Covenant Church, First Congregational Church and The First Congregational Church of Hebron. Strategic and turn around principles which have been used in these churches will be analyzed from a biblical, systemic and organizational perspective. Xerox, IBM and Sears will be analyzed from organizational and system perspectives and this analysis will give us very important insight into this project.

Application of system thinking principles as taught by Doug and Judy Hall during the first year of the doctoral program will be covered as much as needed in this section. An in depth analysis of the dynamic principles of Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Shared Vision, and Team Learning as advocated by Peter Senge sets the foundational focus for this particular project. These are core principles for any profit oriented or non profit organizations to follow since these entities are operationally involved with people. The focus of this systemic focus is to delve deeper into the critical problems from an organizational, functional and operational view point to pin point with accuracy the foundational problems which have to be solved with foundational solutions to reach a complete turn around.

Personal interviews with Rev. Norman Swensen of the Trinity Covenant Church, (Manchester, CT) Rev. Nick Granitsas of the First Congregational Church (Revere, MA), selected leaders of these churches, denominational leaders like Dr. Donald Anderson (President of the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island) and Tony Pappas

(consultant of the American Baptist Churches at the regional level) will constitute a major section of this project for maximization of understanding, analysis, and validity of the subject. Interviews with the leaders of the church models will concentrate on a few questions like

- 1) How did they turn around or resist the declining phenomena of their churches?
- 2) What was the basis and process of their turn around strategies?
- 3) What are the spiritual and theological implications?
- 4) How did they accomplish a corporate culture for personal and corporate transformation?

Chapter 6 is the Confrontation section which will concentrate on observations and findings, and their implications including the necessity for further research in this field, positive and or negative feed back in the system, lessons learned and strategically acceptable steps to follow for continuous learning since we never arrive at or reach a conclusive evidence until we meet the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords in person. We are a learning organization / a living system and that the church is the Lord's body, and the operation of an organic church has to be organized systemically for the glory of God without promoting the organization itself. Hence the formula for recommendation is a guide line only and that the objective of this research is not only to turn around the declining denominational church like Mount Pleasant Baptist Church or a denomination itself but to be a kingdom church or a kingdom denomination for the glory of the King!

CHAPTER TWO

IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF ITS COMMUNITY ON MOUNT PLEASANT BAPTIST CHURCH

The social ecosystem of Mount Pleasant has been changing with the arrival of new Diaspora people, and this “social-ecological” impact has been changing communities, institutions, economy, politics and other multifarious dimensions of social existence. People from different countries are here. What are the implications of the Christian church in response to these various ethnic groups living in Mount Pleasant and the surrounding neighborhoods? Should the white population of the Christian church ignore them and continue to keep up their status quo regardless of the painful consequences? What will happen ultimately to the church if the membership continues to keep dwindling? What are the keys to turn around the declining church into becoming a sharing, caring, nurturing and growing church? This chapter will address all these issues relating to ecology, Diaspora people, homogenization, reconciliation, immigration etc. My total intent is to explore personal evangelism and various ways of making the church relevant to people coming to this transitional neighborhood. A brief history of the American Baptist Churches, USA, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church and the demographics of Mount Pleasant will be covered, while focusing on evangelization and adaptability as systemic solution for community change. Testimonies of a few individuals will be used as illustrations to emphasize the need for reaching the foreign nationals who are living right in our area without going abroad. Statistical information, principles, methods etc. based on the interviews of 90 people of the churches of Rev. Norman Swensen and Rev. Nick Granitsas will be covered in the fourth chapter for a thorough analysis and comparison.

lj While speaking to the crippled man in the Gospel according to St. John, chapter 5, Jesus asked the man whether he was willing to get well. Jesus offered him a choice to stay sick by adhering to his 1500 year old cultural and religious traditions of the Sabbath which had defined his identity, or to embrace change by breaking with his tradition, picking up the pallet and walking with it.

Dr. Alvin Padilla cited the example of a pastor who had ministered for forty years since 1954 at the Jackson Heights' section of Manhattan, New York. The pastor had started with a membership of 350 in 1954 and three million dollars in endowments, but after 40 years of ministry the church had dwindled down to a membership of less than 50 and an annual budget deficit of 200,000 dollars. Two large Hispanic churches had been thriving at the same time on either side of his church, when Dr. Padilla was invited by the retiring pastor to pray especially for the incoming pastor. The retiring pastor was oblivious to the ecological change around him until it was too late.

While addressing the congregation of North Scituate Baptist Church on the occasion of the author's ordination, Dr. Padilla stated, "The main line churches find themselves moving weekly, crawling from one place to the other, limping from activity to activity and not experiencing spiritual vitality to the point of declining in health," and asked the most challenging question, "Do you wish to be well?"⁷ Jesus still keeps asking the question, "Do you wish to be well?" Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is willing to embrace change by accepting all communities into the church, to walk and keep walking, just like the crippled man did.

⁷ Dr. Alvin Padilla, Dean at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary at the Center for Urban Ministerial Education, *Do you wish to be well?* (Ordination Sermon) North Scituate Baptist Church, RI), 23 October 2005.

“Diaspora” is a Greek word which means scattered. The Book of Acts describes the persecution of the church in Jerusalem, and as to how it resulted in the displacement of all the people except the apostles. According to Doug and Judy Hall, “A diaspora is a people dispersed and scattered from their homelands. Diaspora missions is Christian ministry done by diaspora peoples – both in the new lands to which they have gone, and as they return home.”⁸ It was the sovereign purpose of God to use the Diaspora instead of the apostles in spreading the Gospel to all nations (Acts 8:1- 4). It was about time for the church people to be involved in evangelization. People come to the cities of America because of political persecutions, disasters, poverty and various other reasons, which open up a great mission field right in our own door step.

What is the, “social ecology” of the presence of Euro-Americans and people of all other ethnicities at Mount Pleasant, Rhode Island, and what impact does it have on the Christian church?

Social Ecology: Social Ecology refers to the science of relationships which exist between organisms and their environments. Let me give some illustrations. It is common knowledge even today among the Native Indians of Sante Fe reservations in New Mexico that the white people came to that region for the first time and cut off all the mahogany and oak trees. Much profit was made by the white immigrants but the ecosystem has been affected resulting in vast acres of barren land. While ministering to these Nambe Indians (tribal name) in New Mexico, the writer of this paper has made observations several times that they love nature exactly like the Indians of India do. He has asked them many times

⁸ Dr. Doug and Judy Hall, *Douglas A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft, not yet published) 94.

for forgiveness for all the exploitation that they have endured, and especially for the ecological damage which has been done to their land in the past two hundred years.

By the term, “the Social Ecology of Diaspora (Greek) or displaced people in the USA,” I am referring to the influence of the immigrants with the people, culture, economy and institutions of their new homeland. In essence, the ecology of the Diaspora presence aims at the inclusion of the demographic information. Sometimes, it analyzes the most imperceptible influences of the Diaspora people on the people of the host country, their economy, and institutions. Scientifically speaking, foreign and new elements often affect the ecosystems of the natural world. New Diaspora people coming from different countries into the United States of America affect this country’s social system exactly like the new elements do as they encounter the ecosystem of the natural world. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church should interrelate with the social ecology of the people of this transitional neighborhood. This interrelation is beneficial to the church in its approach to reconcile the community to Christ. The church will become multinational and the growth process will accelerate in a few years. The ministry of the church will not die.

According to the BBC News broadcast on the radio on September 18, 2006 the vineyard owners of the Southern France did not want the government authorities to develop a new commercial road system constructed through the land indicating that the ecology would be contaminated and the country setting with all its natural beauty would be lost.⁹ Farmers have been exposed to this type of ecological danger in England in the past, and they have fought back recently against the world’s largest retail giant Wal-Mart from

⁹ Robin Slosowich, “BBC World News,” 89.7FM WRNI, 19 September 2006.

establishing retail stores in the country side. Preservation of the ecosystem is their primary concern.

We are living in an interrelated social environment. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are perfectly interrelated just like His inter-relational communion with his created universe. Dr. Douglas Hall points out, “God and our first parents and the created order perfectly interrelated with each other in the garden. Created from community, creation is probably best understood from the standpoint of community,” and that we are conditioned by the interrelated social environment to think, “inter-rationally in the broader interrelated world.”¹⁰ America has been changing very dramatically, and the ecological impact is felt by the communities, educational institutions, businesses, economy, politics and other multifarious aspects of the American society. This socio-ecological impact is very significant at the Mount Pleasant section of Providence and the state of Rhode Island.

Brief History of American Baptists

American Baptists, Southern Baptists, and scores of all other Baptist bodies in the USA and around the world grew out of a common tradition begun in the early 17th century. They were evangelical and fundamental in emphasizing the Lordship and atoning sacrifice of Christ, baptism of believers, competency of all believers to have direct relationship with God and to interpret Scripture, the influence of the Holy Spirit on individual lives and ministries, and autonomous congregations free from government interference and hierarchical polity. Emphasizing the geographical concentration, the Northern Baptist Convention was formed and later was renamed the American Baptist Convention in 1950.

¹⁰Douglas Hall and Judy Hall , *A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft not yet published), 16.

In 1972, it was reorganized and the name was again changed to American Baptist Churches, USA to reemphasize the congregation-centered mission of the denomination. Growing out of The First Baptist Association founded in 1707, American Baptist Churches, USA comprises of 34 regions at the present time.

The strength of the American Baptist denomination was that all the American Baptist churches preached the fundamental message of salvation and baptized only the regenerated believers. Also, they concentrated on the young people, and the church school was flourishing with record attendance bringing hundreds to the saving knowledge of Jesus. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Sunday School used to have more than 150 young people attending all Sunday school classes and youth activities in the fifties. The denominational statistics for all American Baptist Churches in the country indicate 59,994 baptisms in 1940, 60,763 in 1950, and 51,611 in 1960.¹¹ The slow decline started spiraling down but unnoticed. The number of baptisms declined in 1970 to 34,546 and the number dropped down to 31,904 in 1980. Slacking off gradually in the sixties by sugarcoating the gospel message and not focusing on the youth, the number of baptisms declined to 21,524 in 1990 and to an all time low of 17,567 in 2000 (Table: 13). It is alarming to see the loss of 201,853 in church school enrollment from 387,738 in 1983 to 185,885 in 2001 (Table: 14). It is a loss of 52.06%. No explanations seem to be convincing. At this rate 18 years from 2001(2019) church school enrollment will be a disaster.

The children are the future but the dwindling number indicates deplorably that the future of the denomination is at stake in the United States. Some churches are aware of the seriousness of the situation during the present time but a majority of the American Baptist

¹¹ WWW.ABC,USA.ORG

Churches, are conceited believing that nothing can happen to them exactly like their counterparts were in the sixties and after. Ministry to young people and baptism after regeneration can turnaround the declining churches. It is absolutely possible. A few churches like Mount Pleasant Baptist Church are willing to make a change to regain their original strength, which in turn will influence the others.

History of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church

MPBC had its humble origin in cottage prayer meetings in 1868. People used to either walk or ride a horse-drawn carriage from the city of Providence and around the region for 10 years to come to Mount Pleasant. According to the journal, “Beginnings” “Mount Pleasant was the first church to be built in Mount Pleasant and was the result of the religious work in the community, the activities of which were recorded in 1868.” And the journal reasserts its findings that, “a need for local community worship was recognized and cottage prayer meetings were first begun by the followers of Christ in Mount Pleasant. In the spring of 1878 with only \$7.00 in the treasury, subscriptions were solicited, land was purchased and a building was built on Chalkstone and Fallon Avenues by July.

Debts proved too great and the “rescue” came from Rev. E.G. Taylor, DD Pastor of the First Baptist in Providence. Rev. Taylor then “took charge of the religious services.” In October 1878 residents of the neighborhood worshipping in the chapel and calling the work the “Chalkstone Avenue Mission,” placed a request with Rev. Taylor that American Baptist denomination take over the mission work and property. This they did for the sum of \$1.00 and at this time the Mission became known as the “First Baptist Church Mission.” This relationship with the First Baptist Church provided new leadership and increased the size of

the congregation. This work of the mission was called the “Mount Pleasant Mission” and marked the beginning of the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church.

In February 1883 the trustees of the mission unanimously voted to form a regular Baptist Church in Mount Pleasant and on February 25, 1883, the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church was organized with 25 members. Rev. Wesley L. Smith was named first pastor on June 1, 1883. Under his leadership the church experienced marked prosperity. Land was purchased at the corner of Academy and Roanoke Street, and the church building was moved from Chalkstone Avenue.

By 1899 the Sunday school had grown to such an extent that larger quarters were necessary. Because the fund-raising proved difficult, meetings for a short time in 1903 were held in a large tent holding 600 people at a site on Academy Avenue where Brooks Drug Store now stands. A building committee was elected in 1903 and construction of the first section of the new church was begun. It was dedicated on March 7, 1909. In 1933 the Church celebrated its 50th anniversary. In 50 years it had received 812 persons into membership.”¹²

Right from the beginning the Lord began to answer their prayers by adding people to the church and the blessing of God continued from one decade to the other. The Sunday school used to be filled to capacity with more than 150 young people studying the Bible fervently until the late fifties when secular views started to emerge and take a toll. It was a systemic problem requiring a fundamental solution but linear answers were sought. Regeneration as a prerequisite for immersion baptism was replaced with affirmation.

¹² Dr. Renato E. Leonelli and others, eds., *Beginnings, Mount Pleasant-Elmhurst Neighborhood Jubilee Festival*: Providence, RI) 1986, 2.

Secondary culture began to assert its modernized approach to spirituality and the infection in the system began to spread wider and wider to affect the rest of the system. Secondary culture speaks of elite culture in terms of their relationships, communication, needs and other aspects of life getting satisfied in an organized, logical and secular manner. These wealthy people, according to Dr. Hall, “create complex organization structures such as those used in business and government, and they are oriented to written documentation and formal agreements than formal communication.”¹³ Modernism speaks of assimilation of different views instead of believing the bible as the supreme authority on spiritual subjects like creation, redemption, heaven etc. It applies secular logic while defining the relevance of spiritual orientation to life. Linear solutions deal with problems in straight lines as cause and effect. Every problem has a possible cause and has some one or something to blame. As a result the problem seems to suggest a simple locus of responsibility seeking a reacting approach. It is the limitation of human mind to see reality in terms of straight lines and not in interrelationships. It is seeing part of the problem and not the root of the problem. Peter Senge states, “The key to seeing reality systemically is seeing circles of influence rather than straight lines.”¹⁴

Survival techniques and linear solutions to fix the problems ended up causing more monstrous obstacles for the church. In 1933 the celebration marked the 50th anniversary with membership receipt of 812 persons in 50 years. An average of 16 people became members every year for 50 years from 1883 to 1933. In 2003 and 2004 the attendance dwindled to single digits with the highest number being 22. The original vision of the

¹³ Doug Hall, *The Boston Model of Christian Development* Boston: Emmanuel Gospel Center, 2004

¹⁴ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline, The Art and the Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York, NY: Currency Doubleday 1990), 75.

Kingdom of God was on the back burner during the steady declining years starting from the late fifties, which is the fundamental problem adding on to other problems. The need for a systemic solution is to look for the fundamental solution.

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church showed according to the American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island a membership total of 28 for 1999 and 32 active members as of 2003. The Anglo population has dwindled down and the church has had the lowest number of 8 on Sunday services showing signs of readiness to shut down the operation. The onset of the immigrant population probably has had an effect on this church although there is 61% of the whites still living at Mount Pleasant. The situation has been turning around already. 16 people have been baptized in the past two years, and the converts are added to the church. All the principles and methods which I have learned from Rev. Swenson and Rev. Granitsas are indispensable. They will be analyzed in the fourth chapter. I have started using them already at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. Our declining denominational church has been turning around. Praise the Lord!

History of the Community of Mount Pleasant

According to the Providence Plan, “Mount Pleasant is a primarily middle –class residential neighborhood in the northwest quadrant of the city. The area is bounded by the neighborhoods of Manton to the west, Olneyville to the south, Valley to the east, Elmhurst to the northeast, and the town of North Providence to the north. The major street boundaries that define the Mount Pleasant area are Academy Avenue to the east Smith Street to the northeast, Atwells Avenue to the south and portions of Bullock Chalkstone, Mera and Rushmore Avenues to the west. Mount Pleasant was one of the last sections of the city to be developed, and as a result, most of the houses are of medium size on well

landscaped lots and tree-lined streets. Although some houses were constructed in the 19th century, most were built in the 20th century.

The common land in Mount Pleasant remained farm through much of the 18th century with little development activity. By the 1730s, two roads had been established with the purpose of delivering produce from the outlying farms. The roads included the northern branch along what are now Douglas Avenue and Eaton Street and the southern branch along Chalkstone Avenue.

Settlement remained sparse in Mount Pleasant until nearly the end of the 19th century. During the early 1870s, parts of house lots were laid out, but the national economic panic of 1873 dramatically slowed down development plans. Although plats sized for most modest homes were laid out, there were some large lots intended for more substantial houses located south of Chalkstone Avenue and west of Academy Avenues. A couple of houses appeared along the major streets before the late 1880s, but substantial residential development occurred only after the economy picked up and public transportation improved. By 1882 streetcars traversed Chalkstone Avenue, extending out to Smith Street and North Providence by the 1890s. In the early 1900s a neighborhood commercial strip formed along Chalkstone Avenue between river Avenue and Mount Pleasant Avenue. Today that commercial strip is still a thriving part of the neighborhood. Another neighborhood landmark is Trigs Memorial Golf Course, a full 9 holes and a club house in the middle of the city.

By the early twentieth century Mount Pleasant area was predominantly middle and upper middle-class. The ethnic composition of the area began to become more diverse after 1900, as second and third generation Irish began to move into the area to escape from

the more crowded neighborhood like Smith Hill and Upper and Lower South Providence. By the mid 20th century, second and third-generation Italians comprised a significant portion of the neighborhood's ethnic composition, many of them having moved from Federal Hill.

The quiet and spacious qualities of the Mount Pleasant neighborhood, in conjunction with the availability of large tracts of undeveloped land in the form of 19th century estates attracted various large educational institutions. The area bounded by Mount Pleasant, Bullock and Chalkstone Avenues contains Rhode Island College, Mount Pleasant High School and La Salle Academy. Along with Trigs Memorial Golf Course, this institutional area is significant in that it provides the neighborhood with open space.

Mount Pleasant Community Analysis

The population of Mount Pleasant in the year 2000 according to the US Bureau of Census was 10,221 with the majority being the White at 60.5% and the Hispanic 24.1% with the rest of the minorities representing the Blacks at 9%, Asian and Pacific at 2.7% and Non-White at 3%. It was 100% White domination at Mount Pleasant in 1960. The population in 1990 was 9236 with the white at 94.9% and the Hispanics representing 4.7% with the rest of the minorities representing the Blacks at 1.3%, Asian and Pacific at 1.7% and Non-White at 5.1%. Table 1 below shows the number of residents living at Mount Pleasant as 10,221 with an increase of 1185 in 10 years from 1990 to 2000.

Table 1. Population, 2000

| | Mount Pleasant | Providence |
|---|----------------|------------|
| Number of Residents | 10,221 | 173,618 |
| Percent of Providence Population residing at Mount Pleasant | | 5.9% |

Source: US Census Bureau published by the Providence Plan

A careful observation of the statistics below in Table 2 and Table 3 illustrates the declining number (-34.4%) of the Whites in the past two decades. It is a very significant difference from 94.9% to 60.5%. Also, there is a 19.4% increase of the Hispanic population in 2000 in comparison to the previous decade. Increase of the other ethnic minorities is noticeable as well.

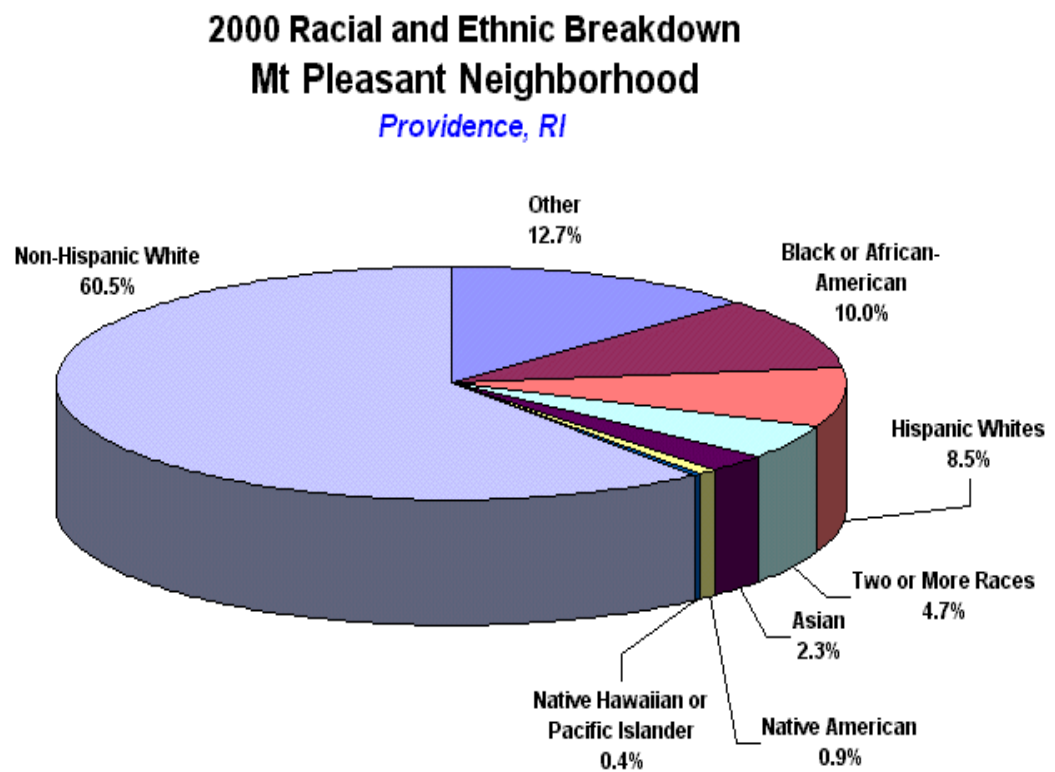
Table 2. Race, 2000

| | Mount Pleasant | | Providence | |
|---|----------------|---------|------------|---------|
| Race | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Hispanic | 2,462 | 24.1% | 52,146 | 30.0% |
| Non-Hispanic White | 6,184 | 60.5% | 79,451 | 45.8% |
| Non-Hispanic Black | 917 | 9.0% | 22,103 | 12.7% |
| Non-Hispanic Asian | 221 | 2.2% | 10,303 | 5.9% |
| Non-Hispanic American Indian/ Alaskan Native | 73 | 0.73% | 1,446 | 0.8% |
| Non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | 5 | 0.0% | 81 | 0.0% |
| Non-Hispanic persons claiming two or more races | 303 | 3.0% | 6,357 | 3.7% |
| Non-Hispanic other | 56 | 0.5% | 1,731 | 1.0% |

Source: US Census Bureau published by the Providence Plan

Table 3 below is a reminder that a few years from now, the number of the Non- Hispanic White 60.5% living at Mount Pleasant will dramatically decline and that the Hispanic population will increase proportionately.

Table 3. Mount Pleasant Race and Ethnicity



Source: US Census Bureau published by the Providence Plan

Mount Pleasant is becoming more multicultural than ever before. Table 4 below shows 56% birth rate for the whites between 1995 and 1998 and the number declined to 41% between 1999 and 2002. In comparison, the birthrate for the nonwhites increased significantly during the same period. Since more men are coming from other countries into this neighborhood the ratio of the number of men to each 100 women is 86:100. There are 52% of families with children. Of these families, 37.5 % have never been married, 10% are divorced, 8% are widowed, and 1.6% of them are separated. The unemployment rate is 5.5% and the percentage of total labor force employed in the blue collar occupations is 54.1%.

Table 4. Births by Race & Ethnicity, Mount Pleasant

| | Mount Pleasant | | 1999-2002 | |
|------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | 1995-1998 | | | |
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| White | 322 | 56% | 270 | 41% |
| African-American | 76 | 13% | 116 | 18% |
| Asian | 23 | 4% | 8 | 1% |
| Hispanic | 151 | 26% | 255 | 39% |
| Other/Unknown | 8 | 1% | 4 | 1% |
| All Births | 580 | 100% | 653 | 100% |

Source: RI Department of Health published by the Providence Plan

Diaspora influence on labor, business and the economy: Boston and other American cities used to attract foreigners in the past but not the city of Providence, Rhode Island. This situation has dramatically changed. There has been a steady increase of immigrants coming to Providence in the last five years although the statistics show the numbers as of 2000. As mentioned earlier, this is the limitation of the statistical analysis.

The future of Mount Pleasant is reflected in the present educational system at Mount Pleasant. Cultural change is on the increase underlying the importance of the Spanish language. 35.4% of 1677 students enrolled at the Mount Pleasant Public School speak Spanish in comparison to the students at the Providence public schools where 41.6% speak Spanish out of 26,668 students. This data which is shown below is according to the year 2000 (Table 5).

Table 5. Primary Language of Public School Students

| Primary Language of Public School Students, 2000 | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| <i>Language</i> | <i>Mount Pleasant</i> | | <i>Providence</i> | |
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
| English | 966 | 57.6% | 12,143 | 45.5% |
| Spanish | 594 | 35.4% | 11,096 | 41.6% |
| Asian | 51 | 3.0% | 2,193 | 8.2% |
| Other | 54 | 3.2% | 992 | 3.7% |
| None Listed | 12 | 0.7% | 244 | 0.9% |
| All Students | 1,677 | 100.0% | 26,668 | 100.0% |

Providence School Department

The Providence Plan

Source: The Providence School Department published by the Providence Plan

The statistics at the present time has dramatically changed. More people representing El Salvador, Bolivia, Honduras, Dominican Republic etc. have come in large numbers to Mount Pleasant leading to the change in the statistics. Pastors and other missionary workers in Mount Pleasant and around need bilingual skills more than ever, without which churches will end up shutting down. The Church of the Messiah, an Episcopal Church located about 2 miles from Mount Pleasant Baptist Church closed last month because of a steady decline for the past few years.

According to Table 6 below, 43.6% of the Mount Pleasant students are Hispanic in terms of race and the number of the Providence School students is slightly higher, 49.5%. Euro-American students are numerically lower than the Hispanic students. There is a very significant need for evangelism to the Hispanics of both Mount Pleasant and Providence School students. These public schools are located within a seven mile-radius.

Table 6. Racial Breakdown of Students

| Public School Students by Race, 2000 | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| <i>Race</i> | <i>Mount Pleasant</i> | | <i>Providence</i> | |
| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
| Native American | 14 | 0.8% | 233 | 0.9% |
| Asian | 57 | 3.4% | 2,451 | 9.2% |
| Black | 377 | 22.5% | 6,052 | 22.8% |
| Hispanic | 731 | 43.6% | 13,157 | 49.5% |
| White | 498 | 29.7% | 4,676 | 17.6% |
| All Students | 1,677 | 100.0% | 26,569 | 100.0% |

Providence School Department

The Providence Plan

Source: The Providence School Department published by the Providence Plan

67.6% of students at Mount Pleasant have their birth place listed in the United States and the rest of the 32.6 % are foreign born according to the Providence School Department (Table 7). 65.3 % of the Providence school students have their birth place listed in the United States with the rest of the 34.7 listed as foreign born. The foreign born students in both Mount Pleasant and Providence Public Schools represent the Diaspora presence from various countries like Canada, Africa, Europe, Puerto Rico, Asia & Middle East, South

America, South East Asia, Central America and Islands and other countries. This is a vast mission field for evangelism

Table 7. Place of Birth of Students in Providence Public Schools

| Place of Birth of Students in Providence Public Schools, 2001-2002 Enrollment | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|--|
| <i>Place of Birth</i> | <i>Mount Pleasant</i> | | <i>Providence</i> | | <i>Mount Pleasant as a Percent of Providence</i> |
| Rhode Island | 904 | 51.9% | 13,319 | 49.0% | 6.8% |
| Other US State | 273 | 15.7% | 4,436 | 16.3% | 6.2% |
| Africa | 37 | 2.1% | 532 | 2.0% | 7.0% |
| Asia & Middle East | 6 | 0.3% | 79 | 0.3% | 7.6% |
| Canada | 1 | 0.1% | 22 | 0.1% | 4.5% |
| Central America & Islands | 120 | 6.9% | 2,532 | 9.3% | 4.7% |
| Europe | 6 | 0.3% | 95 | 0.3% | 6.3% |
| Puerto Rico | 38 | 2.2% | 1,172 | 4.3% | 3.2% |
| South America | 51 | 2.9% | 424 | 1.6% | 12.0% |
| Southeast Asia | 4 | 0.2% | 125 | 0.5% | 3.2% |
| Unknown Birthplace | 303 | 17.4% | 4,429 | 16.3% | 6.8% |
| Total | 1,743 | 100.0% | 27,165 | 100.0% | 6.4% |

Providence School Department

Source: The Providence School Department published by the Providence Plan

The following Table 8 shows clearly the great demand for nurses in Rhode Island. Nursing aids including orderlies and attendants are the second highest need in the state. Rhode Island Hospital, Roger Williams Hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital, Miriam Hospital, the Veterans Hospital and other health institutions are located within the ten mile radius of Mount Pleasant. They have been experiencing severe shortage of nurses for a few years

Table 8. Where Jobs are in Rhode Island

| Occupation | Estimated Vacancies | Vacancy rate | Part time | Temp. or seasonal | college Degree | Rate hourly |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Registered Nurses | 962 | 10.1% | 42% | 22% | 98% | \$28 |
| Nursing aides, orderlies & attendants | 630 | 9.6% | 47% | 1% | 0% | 10.00 |
| Cashiers | 592 | 5.0% | 69% | 17% | 0% | 7.00 |
| Retail sales persons | 561 | 3.8% | 70% | 16% | 0% | 7.00 |
| Waiters & waitresses | 374 | 3.3% | 67% | 50% | 0% | 6.87 |
| Customer service representatives | 340 | 5.0% | 16% | 1% | 14% | 13.00 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|-----|-------|------|------|------|-------|
| Maids & house keeping cleaners | 339 | 13.6% | 48% | 16% | 0% | 7.75 |
| Counter attendants, cafeteria, concession & coffee shop | 290 | 8.5% | 69% | 18% | 0% | 7.00 |
| Restaurant cooks | 275 | 10.3% | 3% | 14% | 0% | 12.00 |
| Food preparation workers | 245 | 9.5% | 54% | 53% | 0% | 8.00 |
| Licensed practical & licensed vocational nurses | 223 | 12.2% | 56% | 1% | 77% | 17.06 |
| Carpenters | 214 | 4.8% | 26% | 23% | 0% | 14.00 |
| Security guards | 180 | 5.8% | 53% | 21% | 0% | 8.00 |
| Dining room & cafeteria attendants & bartender helpers | 129 | 9.3% | 67% | 20% | 0% | 6.75 |
| Tellers | 127 | 6.6% | 28% | 0% | 0% | 10.00 |
| Insurance claims & policy processing clerks | 126 | 8.6% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 12.02 |
| Teacher assistants | 119 | 4.2% | 36% | 0% | 25% | 7.00 |
| Preschool teachers, except special education | 101 | 7.3% | 12% | 12% | 38% | 8.75 |
| Mental health counselors | 89 | 17.8% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 21.63 |
| Telemarketers | 89 | 6.6% | 78% | 4% | 0% | 10.00 |
| Recreation workers | 75 | 8.9% | 49% | 49% | 7% | 7.25 |
| Financial managers | 70 | 4.3% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 21.63 |
| Emergency medical technicians & paramedics | 66 | 17.8% | 17% | 0% | 0% | 11.00 |
| Electricians | 63 | 3.9% | 0% | 0% | 2% | 20.00 |
| Dental hygienists | 47 | 7.7% | 74% | 100% | N/A | 25.00 |
| Amusement & recreation attendants | 46 | 14.4% | 59% | 100% | 0% | N/A |
| Recreational protective service workers (lifeguards etc.) | 44 | 12.9% | 100% | 30% | 0% | 7.19 |
| Medical & clinical laboratory technologists | 43 | 7.7% | 74% | 0% | 50% | 12.00 |
| Industrial engineers | 38 | 6.1% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 28.85 |
| Computer system software engineers | 38 | 3.6% | 8% | 0% | 100% | 28.85 |
| Clinical, counseling and school psychologists | 37 | 9.3% | 54% | 0% | 100% | 30.00 |
| Multi machine tool setters, operators & tenders(metal/plastic) | 36 | 5.9% | 6% | 0% | 0% | 9.80 |
| Physical therapists | 36 | 4.4% | 19% | 0% | 100% | 23.00 |
| Social & community service managers | 34 | 6.9% | 05 | 0% | 92% | 26.44 |
| Database administrators | 33 | 12.2% | 0% | 3% | 100% | 16.66 |
| (metal/plastic) | 29 | 8.8% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 19.23 |
| Chemists | 25 | 6.9% | 0% | N/A | 100% | N/A |
| Insurance underwriters | 25 | 4.1% | 0% | 0% | 88% | 16.83 |
| Compensation, benefit & job analysis specialists | 23 | 7.9% | 0% | 0% | 55% | 14.42 |
| Biochemists & biophysicists | 22 | 22.0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | N/A |
| Financial analysts | 21 | 3.2% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 21.75 |

Source: Bill Troberman reporting in the Providence Journal 22, January 2006

Rhode Island Job Vacancy survey 2005 published by RI Dept. of Labor and Training

Health Care is the largest private employer in Rhode Island and has close to 64,000 (15%) private sector employees. Along with social services, Health Care is the largest generator of new jobs in the industry. Lynn Arditi, the staff writer for the Providence Journal speaks of a lack of nursing educators at state schools in Rhode Island fueling shortage and leading to two-year wait for admissions. This is a national problem and a well known fact that the nursing colleges and universities around the country have been turning away candidates. More than 32,000 qualified applicants were turned away in 2005. According to Ms. Arditi's article which deals with the, "Shortage" of nurses, there is a crisis in the nursing profession, "the number of licensed nurses in Rhode Island is just under 17,500, although not all of those with Rhode Island licenses work in the state," and that "the shortfall could more than triple, to 25 percent by 2010."¹⁵

There is a long waiting list to get into the nursing schools in Rhode Island. The article, "Shortage" refers to the waiting period which generally is a minimum of three or four semesters, and that the number of students, "on the waiting list is now estimated at 700 to 800," according to the statement made by the spokesperson for the Community College of Rhode Island.¹⁶ Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island are two other state nursing schools which offer four year baccalaureate programs, and they have to turn away applicants every year. There is a shortage of nurses because of a shortage of teachers in the nursing program. Again, the article cites the pay as the main reason for the shortage of teachers. The starting salary for a nursing school faculty member with a master's degree last year averaged \$40,400, "which is \$2500 less than the starting

¹⁵ Lynn Arditi, *Shortage*, (The Providence Journal, Providence, RI), 22 January 2006, F14.

¹⁶ Ibid.

wages for registered nurses at Rhode Island Hospital.”¹⁷ An experienced nurse can earn up to \$ 78, 000 a year.

India produces 13,000 to 15,000 nursing school graduates every year creating an opportunity for employment opportunities in Rhode Island.¹⁸ Louis Sperling, vice president of human resources at Rhode Island Hospital made a trip to India last year to recruit nurses in three cities. He was able to recruit 30 nurses for the 125 openings, with the agreement that the Rhode Island Hospital would apply for permanent residency visas for them. If the trend continues there will be more Indian nurses coming to Providence. Nurses are “knowledge workers” and can easily apply for H1-B visas for immigration.

Increase of Diaspora presence at Mount Pleasant has impacted the service sector and different sections of Providence, and the outskirts of the city. The next after the highest demand for nurses in table 5, is the need for nursing aids, orderlies and attendants. Foreign born nationals living in and around Providence are filling in for these jobs since no college degree is required. According to Jerry Dugan, district manager for Waste Management, 40 percent of the company’s 150 employees are Hispanic or of another minority group. Hispanics and others with bilingual skills are able to easily acquire, most of the jobs in the table above, where no college degree is required leaving other low paying jobs to other minorities.

Bilingual Hispanics and Hispanics with or without some knowledge of English are hired in most jobs in the service industry especially for jobs which require no college degrees. Most jobs like the ones which have appeared recently in the following Rhode Island Com Automatic Job Digest advertisements (Appendix 1), look for people with

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

bilingual skills and multicultural experiences or, with knowledge preferences for the position include ability and sensitivity working with a variety of people from low-income populations with diverse education, lifestyle, ethnicity, and cultural origins.

Many businesses owned by people from Cambodia, Middle East, India, Guatemala, Mexico, and other nations are visible in Mount Pleasant. Bolivian Restaurant, Rhedeo Restaurant (Bolivian and El Salvadorian), El Salvador Restaurant, Thai Star, Mi Casa Dominican Restaurant, El Mino (Mexican), Vincent's (Caribbean and American), My Guatemala, Chinese Buffet, Mexican Food etc. represent people from different countries operating successfully at Mount Pleasant while depicting the demographic changes at Mount Pleasant. There is only one American Restaurant called Minelly's at Mount Pleasant because of the fact that the demographic change has brought about the closure of a few American restaurants.

Diaspora influence on the politics of Mount Pleasant and its surrounding communities has been very significant. Juan Garcia is the head of the Committee of Immigrants in Action at St. Teresa Church located close to a mile from Mount Pleasant. He has been working for the past ten years through the church to give a voice to the immigrants' struggles. On May first of 2006, the United Immigrants Coalition of Rhode Island (Immigrantes Unidos) brought together other immigrant organizations like Committee of Immigrants in Action, The Guatemalan –American Alliance, The Mexican-American Association of Rhode Island, The Rhode Island Latino Political Action Committee etc. The organizers of these ethnic organizations called for a May 1 boycott under the slogan, "Day of Action for Immigrant Justice." They joined the nationwide movement on that day

calling for legalization and citizenship for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

500 to 600 immigrant and non-immigrant businesses were closed on May 1, Monday while other firms rearranged the work schedule to accommodate their employees to participate on the boycott. Motivated Temp, Inc. was closed for the whole day without any loss of pay for the employees. Blow Molded Specialties rearranged the work schedule of the employees from Tuesday to Saturday instead of Monday through Friday. Nearly all of the 30 employees of Blow Molded Specialties are Hispanic. Many stores and restaurants located on Broad Street, a Latino power base, as well as those of Academy, Atwells, Manton and Douglas Avenues were closed. Karen Lee Ziner of The Providence Journal, while referring to the comments made by the Rev. Raymond Tetrault of the St. Teresa Church of Olneyville, Rhode Island, indicated that, “the priest has watched the momentum grow since April 10 demonstration. A lifelong Providence resident, Father Tetrault said it was the largest march he has seen in the city.”¹⁹

Muslims are endeavoring to make their presence known at Providence. More than 500 Nigerian Muslim young people, aged 10 and older from cities like Dallas, Houston, Providence, Boston, Miami, Philadelphia and New York stayed during the Christmas week of 2005 for a conference which was organized by the National Council of Nigerian Organizations. Lookman Davies, president of the Muslim Community Center of Rhode Island said that the theme of the year 2005 conference was, “*Breaking Barriers and Integrating into Society.*”²⁰

¹⁹ Karen Ziner, *Thousands of RI Immigrants to Strike*, (Providence, RI: The Providence Journal), 30 April 2006.

²⁰Karen Ziner, *Positive Messages through Culture*, (Providence, RI: The Providence Journal), 26 December 2005, C1.

There are thousands of foreign students attending colleges and universities in the United States. Quoting from Open Doors (Institution of International Education 2006), Achal Mehra, the editor and publisher of Little India lists in his magazine, the number of students studying in USA; India 76,503, China 62,582, South Korea 53,358, Japan 38,712, Canada 28,202, Taiwan 27,876, Mexico 13,931, Turkey 11,622, Germany 8,829 and Thailand 8,765.²¹ He adds that one out of seven foreign students in the United States is Indian with Rhode Island attracting 263 students.²² There are a few hundred international students in each of the colleges and universities in Rhode Island. Lavina Melwani points out in an article, “*Academic Stars*” that there are, “more than 8000 Indian professors enriching university campuses all across America.”²³

First Lady Laura Bush delivered the commencement address on May 20, 2006 at the Roger Williams University upholding the three names of Afghanistan women, Nadima Sahar, Arezo Kohistani, and Mahbooba Babrakzai as symbols of progress in a shrinking world. Paula Nirschel, the founder of the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women, and the wife of the university President Roy J.Nirschel had invited the First Lady to speak at the graduation. While delivering the speech, *Laura Bush showed the photos of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island. She applauded the 900 classmates from whom the three Afghan women had learned about America, which, “will help build a lasting friendship between the people of Afghanistan and the people of America.”*²⁴

²¹ Achal Mehra, *Indians Largest Foreign Student Groups in USA*, (New York, NY: Little India), January 2007,11.

²² Ibid, 11.

²³ Ibid, 13.

²⁴ Alex Kuffner, *A Message of Hope*, (Providence, RI: The Providence Journal.), 21 May 2006, A1.

Harvesting time of reconciliation with God and with Mount Pleasant Community

It is a golden opportunity that prevails at the present time to minister to the foreign nationals who have adopted the United States as their new home land. The city of Providence has the possibility and the promise of receiving the peace of God (shalom) like never before in the history of Providence. Historically speaking, great Baptists like Roger Williams, John Clark, Obadiah Homes along with several others brought liberation to the original settlers of Rhode Island and all those who had escaped from the Puritan persecution in Massachusetts and other states. People found freedom to worship God and were free to go to Brown University for the first time without any prerequisites of Puritan connection. Churches began to prosper in Rhode Island. The First Baptist Church of America was established in Providence and was originally called the First Baptist Meeting House of America to distinguish it from the Church which the Lord Jesus Christ said that He would build. Jesus did not say churches but Church in the singular (one body) indicating the universal sense. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church was originally an extension of the missionary vision of the First Baptist Church of Providence.

The Great Migration (1930-1965) brought about a revolutionary change in the northern cities of the United States.²⁵ Thousands of African-Americans left the South after World War II in search of jobs and moved into the Northern cities. It was a great migration within America because of the fact that thousands left every thing in the Southern part of the country looking for opportunities to better their lives in the North. The older African American Methodist and Baptist churches experienced a phenomenal

²⁵ Douglas Hall, *Quiet Revival* Urban Ministry Class, Boston: Emmanuel Gospel Center, 2004.

growth in their membership at this time. **The Great Immigration** (1830-1930) refers to Europeans leaving their countries in Europe and coming in thousands as immigrants into USA.²⁶ Also, this immigration united the black and the white urban church members during the civil rights movement. It was very unfortunate that many whites missed the opportunity for contextual evangelization by turning their backs on the cities commonly known as the white flight. Dr. Douglas Hall, Missiologist and an expert on missions in Boston, refers to white flight as whites leaving the city churches and moving into areas far away from the cities.²⁷ Instead of evangelizing and accommodating the Afro-Americans into their churches, most of the Whites moved out of the cities and built churches in places where they could maintain their own white identity. In the words of Dr. Douglas Hall, “Doing theology” was not their focus despite the fact that they were Bible-believing Christians. In his text (soon to be published), *A Culture of Hope*, Dr. Hall points out that when he came to Boston he had the deepest desire for people to see in his life that, “the Bible happened in my life—that in my day I had been a part of what God was doing—that I had participated in events that conformed to and expressed the message of His written Word.”²⁸ The Bible has to happen at Mount Pleasant, also! This is my cherished desire.

Mount Pleasant and the surrounding sections of Providence are ripe for harvest at the present time. Their political, theological, ecological, social, economic and health care problems are very similar to that of the other cities of America. Churches are expected to encounter and bring God’s solution to these needs by reconciling people back to God. Mark Gornick points out, “God’s new city, the world to come, is a world of reconciliation,

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Dr. Douglas Hall & Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft; not yet published), 110.

not homogenization. For God's new creation does not isolate or separate people but joins them together, celebrating unity in diversity."²⁹

Reconciliation speaks of people of all races, ethnicity and countries of origin worshipping God as one group since Jesus died for every one in the universe. The scripture states that sin has separated all people from God making every one His enemies. We are now reconciled to God through the blood of Christ and that we should be reconciled to one another with no establishment of barriers. The Apostle Paul speaks of the ministry of reconciliation, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). He goes on further saying that we are ambassadors for Christ pleading with people to be reconciled to God.

Homogenization speaks of separation of one group from the other, based on ethnicity, national origin or other inclusive characteristics. There are no barriers in Christianity because of our oneness in Christ. It is imperative that we must preach the Gospel to every creature. The Great Commission has no omission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The Gospel according to Mark has a similar emphasis, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Mount Pleasant Baptist Church should be working with Jesus for the Kingdom of God with obedience to the Great Commission as with all other commandments. Jesus questioned all the people at the temple, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11: 17).

²⁹ Mark Gornick, *To Live in Peace* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 26.

MPBC is expected by Jesus to be a house of prayer for all nations and should not exclude foreign nationals who are living in this neighborhood. Homogenization is not the vision of Jesus. The apostle John according to the book of Revelation saw in his vision, “And after these things I looked and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Rev. 7:9). MPBC has to envision foreign nationalities of every language represented in the Kingdom of God and not one isolated group or nation or language.

The purpose of the Incarnation of Christ has been for the evangelization of the world, and this evangelization of every creature is a must because of Christ’s Incarnation in the first place. Orlando Costas points out, while referring to contextual evangelization, “The God of the Incarnation is not a supra-cultural, supra-temporal, and supra-spatial deity with a universal language and a ‘homogenous mass’ as interlocutor. Rather the God of the Incarnation is the God who chose in sovereign freedom not only to be contextualized in the history and socio-cultural reality of a first Galilean Jew but also to become available, through the transmission of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, to every person and community in their concrete reality.”³⁰

MPBC is willing to be ambassadors for Christ in reaching the world and to get people reconciled to God. The foreign nationals are right here and are willing to receive the gospel. Mount Pleasant and the surrounding communities are ripe for harvest and the reapers have to evangelize them before it is too late. The following testimonies of people from a few countries illustrate the fact that personal evangelism to the foreign born people

³⁰ Orlando Costas, *Liberating News*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 25.

is a definite possibility and that, they are willing to be a part of the multicultural body of Christ at MPBC to be nurtured and trained as disciples to win others for Jesus thus fulfilling the Great Commission. The church is already a prayer house for all nations.

Testimony of Elier G. from Puerto Rico

Elier (affectionately called Chico) speaks Spanish and broken English. The writer of this paper was appointed to serve as the pastor of the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church on November 1, 2004. The pastor started visiting the local Dunkin Donut coffee shop every day despite the criticism of a few people, and did friendship evangelism. After witnessing a few times, the pastor invited Chico to church and the people received him happily. It was after the Sunday morning service and during lunch at the table that he gave his heart to Jesus for the first time. He prayed the sinner's prayer with the pastor. Praise the Lord!

Testimony of Jose from Mexico

Jose understands English well but speaks very little. The pastor shared the Gospel of shalom with him at the same Dunkin Donut coffee shop, with an invitation to visit the church. Jose came to Mount Pleasant which resulted in his conversion to Christ.

Testimony of Lydia from Guatemala

While eating Spanish food at the local Guatemala restaurant, "Mi Casa," God opened an opportunity to share the good news of shalom with Lydia. She wanted to know more and came to Mount Pleasant Baptist Church specifically to ask for more explanation about salvation. A Spanish member of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church interpreted the conversation in Spanish to Lydia, and Lydia received Christ as her Lord and Savior.

Testimony of Kateri (A Narragansett Indian)

Kateri came to ask for food but received Christ as Lord and Savior, and food from the pantry. While visiting her and her husband in their apartment, an opportunity opened up to share the Gospel to John, her husband. John promised to come to church and heard the Word a few times. On one occasion over the meal, after the church service another opportunity opened up and the pastor explained the gift of salvation in simple terms and asked him if he was ready to make a decision. John gave his heart to Christ with great joy. He was baptized last August, and he became a member of the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church along with two other candidates, on September 24, 2006.

Yessení Pérez from Dominican Republic

Yessení came to hear the Gospel a few Sundays. She had already given her heart to Christ but needed affirmation and explanation, which resulted in her getting baptized in water by immersion. She is very strong in the Lord and has witnessed to all her family members whom she has tried to bring to Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. None of them speaks English. We have to arrange for them to attend another American Baptist Church, the pastor of which is bilingual and he conducts a Spanish service exclusively for Spanish people.

Testimony of Roger from Honduras

Roger is a student at Mount Pleasant High School. He was very troubled when the pastor met him for the first time at the Dunkin Donut. He had given his life to Christ a couple of years ago but was on the verge of back sliding. The pastor bought him a cup of coffee and spoke to him for a couple of hours and prayed with him at the table, and later took him to school. He had skipped school for the day but was convicted after prayer to go back to school. When he was dropped off at the school, he promised to come to our Teen

Night Meetings which we conduct every second Saturday of the month, and would bring some troubled teens to receive some spiritual help.

There are golden opportunities to reach the Hispanics and other minorities who are on the increase at Mount Pleasant, with the Gospel of Christ before it is too late. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church needs to hire some one with bilingual skills without which ministry in this area will not be possible in the future. I have started learning Spanish. The gospel of John chapter 9 deals with the story of the healing of a blind man. He was born blind from birth and Jesus healed him on the Sabbath day. “Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made clay and opened his eyes (John 9:14). The blind man encountered Jesus who made clay and applied it on his eyes with an instruction to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. It was the Sabbath day and no one could break this 1500 old tradition.

The man who had received healing had a choice to stay blind or to embrace a change and get healed. His mode of thinking had changed when he obeyed and got healed by following the Lord’s instruction. He was interrogated by the public, the Pharisees and the parents about the miracle. His powerful testimony honoring Jesus was questionable to the religious leaders who intimated him to deny Jesus, but the man would not. He was excommunicated from the synagogue but Jesus met him to reveal himself as the Messiah. The Pharisees, the public and the parents of the blind man could not accept the change by giving up their blind tradition to receive the light and to get healed of their spiritual blindness. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church and the denomination have to receive the light from Jesus to give up blind traditions and, embrace the change to give the gospel to people of all nations and receive them into the church for God’s glory. It is happening already!

PART 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION

CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUALIZATION THROUGH LITERATURE REVIEW: THE PRIMARY MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN RECONCILING ITS COMMUNITY TO THE WORLD AND TO GOD

Having seen the community issues, denominational decline and especially the decline of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Rhode Island, it is time to review and focus on some of the foundational literature which has influenced the basis of this project. Also, subsidiary literature has been included in this project because of the wealth of information provided therein to see the big picture. A great deal of consideration will be given to a few sources.

Theological texts, *Exclusion and Embrace* by Miroslav Volf, *Churches, Cities, and Human Community* edited by Clifford J. Green, *Christ and Culture* by H. Richard Niebuhr, *City of God City of Satan* by Robert C. Linthicum and *Missionary Methods* by Roland Allen will be explored. Volf deals with alienation of peoples, which is rooted in strangeness causing violence, conflict and exclusion. God's people have to learn to embrace all people including the victims and the perpetrators with the message of reconciliation.

The authors of *Churches, Cities, and Human Community* describe the metropolitan realities of America and, suggest strategic solutions at the micro and macro levels. Niebuhr deals with identity with God in the context of cultural complexity in his text, *Christ and Culture*. Robert C. Linthicum deals with the dynamic complexities of the cities from Biblical and sociological standpoints, in his text, *City of God City of Satan*. Roland Allen in his text, *Missionary Methods* deals with the methods which the Apostle Paul used in the Early Church. Thomas Rainer's *Breakout Churches*, Michael O. Emerson's *People of the Dream*, illustrate examples of churches and leaders, which have turned around declining churches into productive churches for God's glory.

The secondary foundational sources are James Collins' *Why Some Companies Make The Leap-And Others Don't* along with David Kearns' *Prophets in the dark: how Xerox reinvented itself and beat back the Japanese*, Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*, Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz's *Urban Ministry* and Dr. Elden Villafañe's *Seek the Peace of the City*. The secondary sources will examine exemplary strategies, companies and leaders, to learn from them principles and methods which in turn could be used to

turnaround a declining denominational church and, keep it on the right track of growth and endurance.

First Foundational Sources

Source One: Exclusion and Embrace

People are caught in a vicious cycle of violence, pain, suffering and conflict in different parts of the world, and solutions to these problems some times end up becoming problems themselves and those who try to solve them also become problems. In a world of premeditated injustice, ruthless exploitation and incessant violence the answers are not sufficient, and peace talks at the levels of United Nations, individual governments and at all other levels do not hit the nail on its head. This paper is an attempt to explore and highlight Miroslav Volf's analysis of the dynamics and perplexities of the issues and the biblical ways to look at them while seeking to embrace the perpetrators exactly the same way Christ has embraced with love His former enemies who are the people of God now.

Miroslav was invited to speak in a conference at Potsdam in his former native land now called Croatia which is a part of Yugoslavia, and he was given the topic, "God's Spirit and God's people in the Social and Cultural Upheavals in Europe." He was reminiscent of all the cultural and social devastations that rocked Sarajevo, Berlin and Los Angeles. The effects of that vicious cultural, ethnic and racial strife in those three cities are still lingering in the minds of millions of people all over the world, never to be forgotten and ever to be remembered.

The Serbian fighters called, 'cetnik' caused untold misery and desolation to the land of (former) Yugoslavia putting people in concentration camps, burning down church buildings, raping women and causing every havoc imaginable, and Miroslav Volf was

questioned by Professor Jurgen Moltman as to the possibility of his willingness to embrace a cetnik to which Mr. Volf replied that he could not but as a follower of Christ he should be able to do so. This text, “Exclusion and Embrace” is the result of that encounter and serves as a biblical explanation and the possibility of not only embracing the perpetrators like cetnik but all other unthinkable enemies in every part of the globe as well.

Seeking identity for its own sake results in every type of atrocity, and theological reflection should place at its center identity and otherness on social realities. Justice rights, ecological-well being, and identity and otherness are all related to one another and should not be separated while dealing with social realities. Automatic identity at the place of one’s birth and socially accepted identity at society are distinguishable. Differences without common values cause chaos but universal option of religious and universal values and or of enlightenment can guarantee peaceful co-existence. Communitarian option of promoting heterogeneity and communal distinctives placing oneself on the other side on the cultures may cause oppression and boredom. The post modern option of rejecting universal values and particular identities and accepting individual autonomy is the third option. All these options of universal values, plurality of particular identities and individual identities speak of social arrangements but the theologians should concentrate less on social arrangements and more on a framework of social agents who are capable of envisioning and creating, “just, truthful, and peaceful societies and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will survive.”

The suffering of Christ is for the poor, the weak, the oppressed and the oppressors who have committed oppression, thus including every one. The oppressors should be liberated from the injustice committed through oppression. The reconciliation which

Christ has accomplished on the cross is not only for the oppressed but the oppressors as well. The secular approach of social control and relational thought relate to philosophical hope but the hope based on the cross takes over the philosophical hope.

The author uses a powerful metaphor, “embrace” based on the counsel of Apostle Paul in the book of Romans, “welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you.” The will to embrace precedes any truth about others and any construction of their justice, transcending indomitably all social realities of good and evil. The author asserts that the will to give ourselves to others and welcome them, “to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others except that of identifying them in their humanity.” Embrace is a demonstration that the self and the other belong together in their mutual alterity. Embrace is the best antidote against the evil of exclusion in the context of deception, violence and injustice.

We see the mutuality of self-giving love in the Trinity (the doctrine of God). God so loved the World and gave His only begotten Son and the Son of God loved us and gave Himself for us (John3:16 and Galatians 2:20). The Son is the Son because the Father and the Spirit indwell in Him. There would be no Son without the interiority of the Father and the Spirit. The triune God is a reciprocal relationship. The Son is not the complete transparency of the Father but both are in each other (John10:38). The mutual interiority born out of love depicts the divinity of the persons from eternity to eternity.

Just like Abraham who was a global citizen, we are called to cut off all family and cultural ties recognizing the fact that our allegiance is to the God of, “all families of the earth.” Faith in Christ replaces birth into a people. And God’s universality entails human equality with impartial access of all humanity to the blessings of God. The author asserts

that Christians can never be first of all Asians, or Americans, Croatians, Russians and then Christians. The self-giving Christ has created a community which is, “ the body of Christ” and our baptism into the one body is worked out by the operation of the Spirit of God, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13 thus destroying every barrier and enmity through the cross. We are multi-membered and differentiated but one body. Paul was convicted of the oneness of the body in the Spirit but with discrete members. Abraham’s departure was to live out in the one body of the Jewish people but Christians have a departure to live out in the many bodies of different peoples in the one body of Christ. Most definitely Christian new creation is an evangelical personality which is a catholic cultural identity interlocked with ecumenical community.

The outstretched arms of Christ on the cross for the “godless” speaks of His acceptance of all sinners (the doctrine of Christ). God’s reception of the hostile humanity into a divine community is a perfect model of how people can relate to one another with repentance, forgiveness, making space in one self for the other and healing of memory. The ultimate freedom according to Karl Marx is the kingdom of freedom but it is deficient. The kingdom of freedom is only a process toward the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of love. Nietzsche said, “No deed can be annihilated,” and that “all punishments, too, must be eternal.” The need for forgiveness is a must because forgiveness is the boundary between exclusion and embrace. The reign of God can take place only with a change of heart and behavior. The goal of the cross is the community of God in Christ and in the Spirit. Forgiveness is relationship to the offenders and a passage leading to embrace. The arms of the crucified are open with a sign of space in God’s self inviting the enemy to

come in. We are embraced by God and we must make space for others including our enemies in ourselves and invite them in.

The open arms of the, “father” receiving the, “prodigal” (the doctrine of salvation). The theology of embrace is the story of the prodigal son demonstrating the social significance, which is Miroslav’s theme of the entire text (Luke 15:11-32). The story of the prodigal son (lost, dead) vividly illustrates the fact that the father does not let go of the relationship between them. The son’s return from the distant country despite the fact that he excluded himself from the relationship with the father, and the father’s refusal to let the son out of his heart is the basis of the restoration of the two to each other. The restoration is a relationship based on indestructible love and a flexible order, and it is not based on moral performance or good works. In essence it is an order based on embrace and not on exclusion.

The passion of Christ is the agony of a tortured soul with a broken body to offer the most supreme sacrifice and the most powerful intercessory prayer for the forgiveness of the torturers. God’s love is therefore eternal welcoming both the perpetrators and all victims with the most compassionate embrace. The author concludes this valuable text with the thought that one should know that the torturer will not eternally triumph over the victim and that one is free to rediscover that person’s humanity, and imitate God’s love for that individual. Also, knowing that God’s love is greater than all sin, one is free to see oneself in the light of God’s justice and by doing so one can rediscover one’s own sinfulness.

The entire text is based on the fact that God loves everyone both victims and perpetrators. I like the father’s embrace of the prodigal son without excluding him. His

ever open arms expecting and welcoming the prodigal son, is a notable illustration reminding me that we cannot exclude any one including our perpetrators for whom Christ died. While I was debating whether or not I should attend a party given to a lady (probably not married) in our church who has been expecting a baby, I happened to read the section in the book about the father's willingness to embrace the prodigal son despite all odds of exclusion. I was convicted to attend the party with a willingness to embrace, and the lady was delighted to see me as did her parents. God gave me the grace to embrace.

I have no problems to preach to my congregation to be willing to accept people as they are without becoming judgmental. We have to put ourselves on the other and look at them from their perspective. The restoration is a relationship based on indestructible love and a flexible order, and it is not based on moral performance. We should not judge people about their sins despite the fact that we should preach against sin. God's love transcends all barriers and the cross destroys all enmity in between. The restoration of humanity to God is relationship based and not on morality. Moral values are great but like good works they fall short of the glory of God. In essence it is an order which we should emulate because this celestial order of acceptance (reconciliation) of everyone, is based on embrace and not on exclusion.

Source Two: Churches, Cities and Human Community

The essence of Christian belief is liberty and this freedom is for every one since Jesus died for the entire world. Freedom affirms the centrality of the Bible under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in the life of both an individual follower of Christ and the church in the local, regional and larger context of the Body of Christ. Churches can either independently

or interdependently bring liberation to communities, regions and the whole world under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. The Church of Jesus Christ comprises of all small and large churches both at the denominational and nondenominational levels

Jesus preached the Gospel of liberation in all the cities and so did His apostles (after His ascension) starting from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all over the globe according to Acts 1.8. Based on the biblical model every city in the world has to be reached with the shalom of Christ in the holistic sense for the King of Kings to rule. The biblical view of a complete society under the total Reign of God is not a return to a garden (Eden) but to a city (Jerusalem) The ministry of the church is to be engaged in the community to reach the region and beyond, according to Clifford Green 's text, “ Churches, Cities, and Human Community.”

Green looks at the ministry from the view point of the forms of the church as they relate to the cities, while attempting to reflect on the urban strategy from the micro, the macro and the metropolitan levels. The **micro model of the congregational approach** is at the local level because the focus is, on the church life as simple units. The denominational and judicatory aspects of the church are not taken into consideration. Congregations of different denominations develop different types of ministries in their own communities with their own membership preferences, and theological similarities or dissimilarities. Saul Alinsky was a popular community organizer in 1930s in the neighborhoods of Chicago and he was able to perceive that all urban problems of poverty originated in lack of social organization. Organizations who were responsible for situations of inequality and all other forms of poverty needed to be exposed to with a

campaign of political power to pressure them and to bargain with them as organized communities in the market place of economics, ideas and politics.

The social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has been community organization and they have encouraged their people in every type of organized representation at the communal level to fight for social issues. In 1958 Cardinal Meyer of Chicago established an archdiocesan Office Urban Affairs and appointed Monsignor John Egan to run it as the head of the entity. The Office of Urban Affairs collaborated with Saul Alinsky who was hired by the diocese to come up with urban renewal projects to solve the racial tensions and divisions in the neighborhoods in Chicago.

Church-based neighborhood renewal explains micro approach to urban ministry, and it is interconnected with several entities and situations which are not isolated issues. Bethel New Life, Inc. in Chicago is an excellent example reflecting how one issue is connected to several other issues. Community revitalization constitutes, “a circle of things” and not one or two projects. Holistic strategy is the systemic way to achieve community revitalization since human lives are connected to interrelated variables in complex unites. A vibrant congregation at Bethel is interrelated to volunteer and sweat equity housing program, local residents in control of rebuilding, financial strength, deals made with city government and banks, joint-venture with many congregations for housing, community center for the elderly, day care and art programs for children, and all other self sufficiency programs. Also, Bethel became an employer employing around 500 people and running a budget of 6 million dollars. Nehemiah Project in east Brooklyn and the Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. are other examples of neighborhood renewal accomplished in the best way possible.

Community organizing is another example of micro level approach to urban revitalization. Political organizations and labor unions are weak or may not be possible in certain neighborhoods. There is an identity possibility in a coalition of churches and urban neighborhood in communities. Ecumenically connected churches could initiate and establish community organizations by financially supporting to hire a start-up organizer, providing office accommodations, allowing space in the unused sites, and encouraging participants from their congregations. The organizing project could empower the local people by exposing the community problems to them in such a way that it could tap the best source of skills, finances and expertise from the residents. Demographic changes of the neighborhoods could become opportunities of revitalization for the local congregation if the church could work out a new ethnic diversity thereby evangelizing the new arrivals in the community. Neighborhood organizing is an effective tool to tackle heavy duty issues like affordable housing for the low income groups, shelters for the homeless, education, public safety, youth programs, transportation, health care and other community related issues. Establishment of political economy at the local level leads to productivity in the best way possible as demonstrated by the Nehemiah Project in East Brooklyn Churches. The analysis, reflection, and congregational life at the urban level influences the pastoral education and training to be developed to match the suitability of programs and courses in the city context. Also, funding is a must for any urban initiative to succeed. Small congregations with limited income could partner with other congregations in the metropolitan area and generate financial support like Bethel did. Bethel started with \$9600 but became financially very strong. Collaborating with more than 20 churches with a commitment to raise \$50,000 for several years, the church could accomplish a million

dollar- revolving fund easily to sponsor their sweat equity housing program. Local churches should be concerned about one another in the first place and theologically speaking, they have to do it for the Kingdom of God.

In cooperation with the city, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church was involved in the summer food program and facilitated a united effort from our church to work with the neighborhood children for the entire summer last year. It has been a wonderful community organizing experience for our church in getting involved with a few entities. Also, we work with 7 different American Baptist Churches at the Providence in organizing several projects like raising money for orphanage work in the Dominican Republic. At the micro level, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is involved in supporting James children's Home financially to help Tsunami affected children in India. Also, the church has adopted two Tsunami villages in Madras (Chennai) through Paul Lawrence Ministries, Inc. Soon the church will be involved with the Native Indians in New Mexico. I led one Narragansett Indian from Providence, Rhode Island and she is going to work with our church to reach her people in Narragansett. Also, we are involved with community groups like the local Feinstein Center which organizes many community events and programs for the elderly. One of our deacons has his own Non Profit 501-C-3 organization to help the community kids in teaching them wrestling and thereby keeping them off the streets. It has been a great opportunity to minister to these kids and some have come to know Christ as their Lord and savior. One young man named David got baptized a few months ago. During the recent meeting we have agreed to open our church space to conduct a blood drive sponsored by the Rhode Island Blood Center. This blood drive has the potential to bring the community into the church. Also, at the micro level we are looking at the possibility of

starting an academy, after school program and a child care program in the near future. The preliminary assessment has been made and they are in the second stage in the process.

The macro level approach to urban ministry is from a national or even an international view point relating to larger social, political and intellectual forces than those at the local parish level. Systemic forces need to be dealt with effectively at the national and global levels. Programs funded by federal government, and national budget cut affecting cities from employment and transportation to welfare and healthcare. National economic trends, wars in foreign lands, global political events and other chaos else where could affect the ethnic composition of the cities in the United States suddenly. The drug scenario has an impact on every city regardless of country or culture either at the restricted or liberal level. Partnership at the ecumenical level or at the denominational level constitutes the macro approach to urban ministry to fight against national and international issues which cannot be handled at the local level.

In 1967 Monsignor Egan Rabbi Irving Rosenbaum of Chicago Union of Hebrew Congregations and the Rev. Edgar Chandler of the Chicago Church Federation, the three principal leaders of the Inter-religious Council on Urban Affairs in Chicago joined Rabbi Marc Tannebaum of New York in establishing the Inter-religious Foundation for Community Organizing (IFCO). IFCO was an interfaith organization to promote, recruit personnel, and channel funding for community organization. Monsignor Egan later founded another organization called Catholic Committee on Urban ministry (CCUM). It was to be a net work and it grew very fast in the years 1972-1975 into a diverse network of thousands of Roman Catholic social justice advocates-priests, sisters, and laity. From

their original urban focus they evolved into a dynamic entity engaged in all kinds of social ministry.

Conferences and summer training sessions were held at the University of Notre Dame, and it became a school for thousands of urban ministry personnel and it was a legitimate social ministry in the church. Campaign for Human Development (CHD) was created in 1970 providing national legitimization and funding for thousands of, “community –based, ecumenically sponsored organizations, both urban and rural,” according to Frederick J. Perella JR. (Roman Catholic Approaches to Urban Ministry) CHD was named during the mid 1970s by the Ford Foundation, as the largest and the most powerful source of financial support for community organizations in the United States. National Conference of Catholic Bishops representing national denominational organizations, National Council of Churches representing national ecumenical groups, Interfaith IMPACT representing national advocacy organizations, Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility representing organizations for corporate ethics and influence along with various international organizations like the Vatican, Lutheran World Federation, and the World Council of Churches are all the best examples of macro approaches to urban ministry to deal with macro level issues confronting cities in America.

Every American Baptist Church is an autonomous organization of its own, operating with the principles of democratic congregationalism. The individual churches are affiliated to the main denomination which is in turn is connected to the National Evangelical Churches, WCC and others. The main denomination gives support, leadership training etc. through regional meetings, Conferences, national events etc. The denomination is an excellent organization exactly framed like a regular corporation. Structurally it is like a

secular firm which is also its weakness. The secondary culture has taken over the primary culture leading to the decline of many of the churches under the denomination. A few hundred churches have lost thousands of members in the last three decades. The largest growth happens to be only in the third world countries through the denominations International Ministries. Natural Church Development has been formulated to help churches to get involved in church planting either by partnering with other American Baptist Churches or receiving help from the regional churches. The American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island (ABCORI) and American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) have collaborations with National Council of Churches, World Council of Churches and other macro organizations to deal with national and global issues affecting American and international cities. This is the strength of American Baptist urban churches in successfully handling urban issues at the American Baptist denominational level in collaboration with macro organizations, which may not be possible at a lower level.

America for Christ offering received in all American Baptist local churches are used by the denomination to fund operations in any city in America (Katrina relief) and offering collected under One Hour of Sharing is used to fund operations (Tsunami and earth quakes in Indonesia, Iran etc.) at the international level in any global city. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church supports all the denominational programs. The down side of collaborating with macro entities is the difficulty of supporting the denomination especially in a situation when unwanted issues need to be supported for being a part of the denomination. Utmost caution need to be exercised at the local level while supporting denominationally sponsored programs which may not be in line with the scripture. The pastor should be vigilant in making recommendations carefully.

Policies and decisions affecting the neighborhood while using all the community organizing strategies, demonstrate the fact that they need to be initiated effectively at the denominational level if the systems and structures causing community problems are coming from outside the community. The denominational strategy was to be a part of the National Council of Churches. National Council of Churches is one of the major forms of the church that have multifarious functions, among which are efforts to affect the macro forces shaping urban life in the right or wrong direction.

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA was established in 1950 consisting of Protestant and Orthodox churches. It had a Department of Urban Church within NCC providing urban church office staff members of member churches to get connected with one another and getting joint projects developed with participating denominations. It conducted a remarkable convention on the city church in Columbus, Ohio in 1950. Their resolution was just like that of the American Baptists seeking, “a non-segregated church in a non-segregated society.” During the middle of the 1950s the bilingual churches had to become either self supporting or needed to get united with a self- supporting American Baptist Church, and the Hispanics could not support themselves.

Many mainline denominations belonged to the National Council of Churches (NCC) along with whom the American Baptists conducted an Urban Convocation on October 29-31, 1957. This research was a special statistical analysis done by Rev. James Scott through the Department of the City Church in cooperation with NCC, Home Mission Societies and American Baptist Convention analyzing the statistical analysis of the church membership and American Baptist Churches. Rev. Scott developed a fact book, “American Baptists Today.” 56 and 1/10 % of 1,491,048 of American Baptist congregations were located in

“urban” municipalities even though only 28.1% of the churches were in those locations and could be called “urban” Along with other detailed information it included the devastating fact that the American Baptist denomination lost a total of 308 member churches and an average of 10,473 members per year between 1950-1955.

One of the macro level forms of the church that have various functions to shape the macro forces of urban life is Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility which deals with corporate ethics and influence in society. The Presbyterian Church attempted to invest its financial assets in corporations based on its experience of community organizing activities in urban low income communities and on the experiences of overseas missionaries and churches with U.S corporations abroad. It meant that the church should require the responsibility of the corporations for their policies affecting employees in the work place and communities all over the globe. Don Black, deputy general secretary of the Presbyterian Commission on Ecumenical Relations went in 1966 to the annual stock holders meeting of the Kodak Corporation in Flemington, NJ, to vote Presbyterian Kodak shares on behalf of the members of the church—sponsored Fight organization. It led to the Presbyterians’ pioneering effort of a new corporate responsibility movement.

The Presbyterian denomination became one of the organizing sponsors of the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility despite the fact that the ground work was done at the urban mission office. The national office of the Urban Ministries played key leadership roles in the Joint Strategy and Action (JSAC) Task Force on Ministries to Business and Industry and helped to found the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. The churches were able to monitor through this center all corporations in which they had invested their funds scrutinizing product quality, environmental

responsibility, employment practices, (with special attention to treatment of women and minorities) business conduct in Third World countries and relationships to communities at the plant and office locations.

Corporations usually do not like to be monitored and held accountable for their social responsibility because of which Exxon, Enron, K. Mart, Nike and several firms have done a great deal of damage to people and the environment. Unauthorized oil dumping including the oil spilling has damaged the environment to the maximum, employment of under-aged children and all other exploitations of corporations have been now forced to be ethical. There are corporations like Mc. Donald who are proactive in adapting ethical and social responsibility proactively as opposed to reactively. The Presbyterian Church has to be commended for the awareness of the denomination to social and ethical responsibility.

Both the National Council of Churches and Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility have a significant role to play in shaping the urban ministry of the church in different ways. Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility could play a direct role in influencing corporations as far as their ethical and social responsibilities are concerned like the Presbyterian Church influenced the Kodak Corporation through their exercise of their voting privileges at the annual stock holders meeting. The National Council of Churches does not have the specific role to play like the Presbyterian Church did although NCC can influence indirectly. NCC can influence directly if they have an investment account with a corporation. NCC has a greater role to play in the missions of the church of any denomination than Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility.

The Rhode Island Council of Churches is now helping all denominations like American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island in representing churches to the city with

regard to the unjustifiable fire code rules which are applicable to the bar rooms and other public places where fire accidents are common most of the time. Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility may not be able to represent (American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island) ABCORI to the city in this respect without its ecumenical connections. The American Baptist Churches of USA are aware of this problem along with other ones. The denomination has been looking into widening its partnership with a few more national and international organizations in the near future. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is fully committed to community organizing both at the micro and macro levels because of its affiliation with ABC, USA to bring the message of reconciliation to all people in a practical way.

Source Three: Christ and Culture

What about the question of identity with God in a cultural context? Niebuhr deals with this cultural complexity in his text, *Christ and Culture*. It is imperative to present the message of reconciliation without attacking the culture of anyone. Niebuhr deals with the philosophical, psychological and realistic aspects of culture from a theological perspective, especially in the context of the spiritual complexities of people. The relevance and the implications of culture in the Christian context need to be understood to live and effectively present the gospel of reconciliation. The views of Niebuhr in this book are historically-based although this is not a history book, affirming and confirming the vitality of Christianity without its dependency on culture for its survival. The author's aim seems to be the juxtaposition of Christ and culture while driving across the reinforcing point of the tendency of Christians in forgetting that their own understanding of Christianity as a cultural product. Niebuhr observed the ideational, the human reality of diversity in the

Christian tradition and contemporary life. The normative differences are important to make a responsible choice in theological and ethical choice and in Christian living. I have used some of these theological and ethical ideas of the Christian thought while working with the Native Americans in the Nambe reservations of New Mexico and I am using some of the ideas at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church.

In Christian ethics we make a teleological attempt to understand how vision or the kingdom of God relates to men, groups and movements. According to Niebuhr, there is not a single Christian ethics or Christian ethical principle but there are multiple principles and creative varieties of Christian life. From a psychological perspective distinctions can be made about once-born and twice-born or healthy minded and sick-soul type of experience and expression in Christianity. The twice-born apply values and laws not as guides to action but as criticisms of the self itself while concentrating on the dependence of God.

There are Hebraic, Hellenistic, Latin, Medieval, Byzantine and modern Christian ethic with each having its own distinctive characteristics. Early Christian, Calvinist and modern sectarian ethics in general seem to represent according to the author, the deontological types of ethic while Roman Catholicism, both in its Augustinian and Thomistic forms along with modern liberal Christianity could be classified as teleological. Christians distinguish good and evil in correlation to the variety of cultural, psychological, and sociological patterns evident in their lives. Christian life seems to oscillate on the one hand between faith and the Bible, on the other hand through reason in culture. Neither Christ nor nature is directly presented to the Christian. Christ is mediated through the church and the Bible but nature is mediated through cultural community and wisdom.

Christ against Culture

It is possible to go against culture. The law of God is presented through Christ. Christians are a new people with a new law. Moral law for a Christian is received from Christ. The law of Christ and the revelation of values in Christ acclaimed for validity as far as the moral consciousness is concerned. Benedictine monasticism belongs to this group and in the modern age Leo Tolstoy is an excellent representative of this group. Dependence on the revelation of Jesus Christ as the only final knowledge of moral consciousness is reasonable for the people of this group.

Christ of Culture

This natural law type is the opposite of the new law group although they look alike. Christians who belong to this group interpret the revelation of values and imperatives through Christ from the stand point view of reason of their culture. Assimilation of church to culture, identification of cultural good and law with Christian good and law and, interpretation of cultural ends and imperatives are styled in Christian fashion. Interpretation of the Gospel and its values are done through culture. Moral consciousness is independent of religion and faith. Individual is of supreme value and Christian liberalism interprets ethics of the gospel from the point of view of culture and elements are selected from cultural ethics.

Christ above the Culture

Thomas Aquinas is a great representative of this group just like Roman Catholicism. The gospel and the imperatives of nature are considered divine imperatives with the acknowledgement of partial discontinuity between the two. Divine law is the republication of the natural law but some of it cannot be comprehensible to the natural mind. The gospel

does not present directives for life in culture just like culture does not present spiritual connection to God and mankind. Sometimes Christ and culture seems to be in paradox. The gospel ethics are accepted but not made reasonable to the natural mind. Culture cannot interpret the gospel and the latter cannot interpret the former in terms of its values and imperatives. Nature and culture are divine in terms of demands. The demands of God in the gospel convicts man of sin in his fulfillment of the demands of God in nature. Peace and righteousness exist in hope and faith. The moral life of oscillation receives its energy from outside and its meaningfulness from beyond. The gospel is intended for his inner being and not to his social action outside and he is not supposed to be out of cultural society and he does not think of any of his work as good.

Christ Transforming Culture

Transformational culture is possible if a person is genuinely reconciled to God. The natural law is not the true law of God. The imperatives of the gospel and Christ cannot be replaced with the imperatives of nature and reason. God's laws are final imperatives and they are certainly final values. Revelation cannot replace reason but restores it. Radical transformation is not considered as establishment of a new society but conversion of existent society in all its metaphysical and moral aspects. The divine order of goods in culture is corrupted but restored only in Christ. Also, types of Christian morality are not considered measures of value.

I see culture under God's sovereign rule, and God's people should carry on cultural work only under obedience to Christ. The reconciliatory work of Christ is in the incarnation of the Word becoming flesh. Mankind as well as nature has been corrupt without reconciliation and restoration in Christ. Eternal life starts now and the quality of it is a testament to that fact to be completely revealed in the future. The culture of man is

expected to be a transformed human life for the glory of God in every sense of the term. “This is what human culture can be – a transformed human life in and to the glory of God.”³¹ The author points out that the Apostle John distinguishes between the spirit and the flesh and I strongly agree with it. Creation means what redemption does and there is complete affirmative relation to the whole world material and spiritual. The ruler of the world is not God but Satan although God is sovereign and the Devil is a defeated foe waiting for his time to be thrown into the bottomless pit. Starting from the fall the whole world has been in chaos because of rebellion, disobedience and corruption. People have to accept the truth and receive Christ as Lord and Savior Who is the embodiment of truth. The author asserts that the Gospel of John is aimed at the spiritual transformation of man’s life in this fallen world. John does not see the universal transformation of all mankind with all its cultural existence in his vision but it is going to happen at the coming of Christ. Christian life is cultural life converted by the regeneration of man’s spirit. “Jonathan Edwards,” according to Niebuhr, “with his sensitive and profound views of creation, sin, and justification with his understanding of the way of conversion and his millennial hopes, became in America the founder of a movement of thought about Christ as a regenerator of man in his culture.”³²

I work with the American Indians and they always ask me about their culture and about its extinction if conversion has to happen to them. I have spoken to a few Indian chiefs and shown them from the scripture about the transformation of the inner being without being needlessly worried about the outer man. Culture can be in the mind even after the inward transformation but the mind under the blood can still have the cultural

³¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1951), 196.

³² *Ibid*, 220.

imperatives distinctively and implicitly written in the mind. Many have come to Christ because of the message of reconciliation. The gospel has to be presented to people of any culture with the pre eminence of Christ as the highest order of emphasis. This is the real need for reconciliation of communities to Christ at Mount Pleasant.

Source Four: City of God City of Satan

The message of reconciliation has to be presented to people in the cities like providence where Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is located. We need to understand the cities from Biblical and sociological standpoints. What are the characteristics of cities and forces behind them which are responsible for the spiritual prosperity of one city and the adversity of the other? Robert C. Linthicum deals with the dynamic complexities of the cities in his text, *City of God City of Satan*. Demoniac forces infiltrate into philosophical, psychological, spiritual, material and all other aspects of life. The church of Jesus Christ has to stand firm against these dark forces thereby maintaining a witness against them while bringing deliverance to people with the gospel of Christ. This book informs my thinking of the relevance and the implications of acquisition of God's power in the theological context. Also, it details the dynamics of authority and power that can be demonstrated in the church and through the church while presenting the message of reconciliation.

The views of the author in this book are Biblically-based, affirming and confirming the vitality of a dynamic church which stands against all principalities and powers in the high places, and I have already used some of these views at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in this city of Providence. It is God's will to actualize His kingdom in the city based on shalom. The city with its entire people should live in justice and respect, and share the

resources of the city while maintaining a solid relationship with God. The death and the resurrection of Jesus make provision of liberty from sin, death and law to people individually and as a city with all its systems thus actualizing the kingdom in the city.

The church is placed amidst the city with this message of liberation, and by the proclamation of the message it will be possible to expose all the lies and wickedness of the systems of the city thereby bringing deliverance to people in bondage. The city has a choice to be a City of God or a City of Satan. Jerusalem is the Bride of God (Ezekiel 16:1-14). God married Jerusalem and it became His wife. Jerusalem was God's Delight, potpourri and a light house to the world amidst darkness. The author examines the name of Jerusalem etymologically and finds that shalem which refers to the Canaanite god (Venus) also identified with Baal was not replaced by shalom, but Yahweh was added to it. The name Yahweh should have been substituted for shalem but was not, denoting the existence of tension in Jerusalem and also in every city in the world. The city represents a battle ground for God and Satan. The name Jerusalem expresses the tension in every city. Linthicum asserts, "Jerusalem –and every city – is the battle ground between God and Satan for domination of its people and their structures."³³

Cities are chaos without the true God. There is systemic evil both personally and corporately in the city according to Isaiah 58 and Jeremiah 19. The corruption of the systems were much prevalent in the reign of Solomon with economics of privilege and exploitation, with Ahab of the politics of oppression, and with Josiah the religion of control God's people lost their focus and fellowship with God to the extent that the people of Jerusalem built high places for Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal

³³ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 26.

Jeremiah (19: 3-5). The Apostle Paul speaks of the principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places (Col.1:14-16). Idolatrous spirituality seduces both systems and the people of a city whether it is the worship of Kali in Calcutta, or of Mammon (money) of Baal (power, sexuality) or of Caesar (nationalism) I know this for a fact when we ministered in India especially where the goddess, Kali is in control of a city. We had to fast and pray for several days before we could break the citadel of Satan thereby bringing salvation to 17 Hindus in KolKotta. Those Hindu converts are powerful witnesses today in the remotest villages of this demon city of Kolkatta (Calcutta), India.

The city is an advocate and the church is placed amidst all these systems in the city so that the presence, prayers, proclamation of the message of the kingdom of God and the practice of kingdom principles by the church will constitute a powerful witness in the city. Justice to the poor with their empowerment and the liberation of the powerful could lead to the reformulation of the city according to kingdom principles. The church will not be able to fully accomplish its mandate to the city but the church is still responsible for the same. Faithfulness in being a witness with its life, work and witness, the church must be a sign of the kingdom.

The Apostle Paul was able to see the inability of the church in not being able to fulfill the purpose of the kingdom in the city because of the fact that true community oneness was missing. Being a true community of believers with purity and peace, the church cannot be a powerful witness to impact the city with the gospel. The church, as people in their personal ethics and corporate ethics, can be a great example to reconcile the city to God. The absence of community is a negative witness to the city which perceives that there cannot be authentic Christianity in the church. Linthicum points out that the church should

be a cheerleader and asserts, “God wants to delight over the city and wants God’s people to delight over the city, as well.”³⁴ The universal church with its redemption is a miniature kingdom to reflect the reign of God and therefore the message of the larger kingdom has to spread only through the church. If the church is not an example of a true witness for the kingdom of God then the church is an obstacle to the deliverance of the city. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church has not been a true witness for God’s kingdom.

Life in the community is the ultimate test of the faithfulness or the unfaithfulness of the church. It is a very demanding task for the church but can be done with the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The Spirit of God can build the life of the community of believers in church as one solid force to be a powerful witness for the kingdom. The responsibility of the church is to open to the work of the Spirit of God to be effective in its witness for the kingdom. I accept the theological concept of the church as a community of believers to reflect the kingdom while witnessing in the city to turn the city to God from any type of Baal worship. I have been used by God many times in India in bringing deliverance to people from demons. We could not minister in some villages where we had to deal first with the prince of that city. After much prayer, the control of that particular demon was broken to set people free. By adapting to Robert C. Linthicum’s concepts relating to the community life of Christianity, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church will become a powerful witness for the kingdom of God. We should not limit the mercy of God like Abraham did while dealing with the number of the righteous people in the city waiting to be destroyed. The grace of God for any city is limitless as today as it was ever before. Also, we should

³⁴ Ibid, 165.

make sure that rebuilding the community is very important after building the wall or walls today just like during the time of Nehemiah.

Source Five: Missionary Methods

What were the methods did the Apostle Paul use for his successful establishment of churches? The primary task of Allen Roland in this classic book is to elucidate the methods of Paul the Apostle in establishing churches in the four provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia during the period between AD 47 and AD 57. The Apostle Paul designed his method of work in such a way that the centers of commercial activity and intellectual activity became centers of evangelistic activity. The early Christians in these four provinces were learners who were able to give proof of their faith. They looked for evidence, and after acquiring enough knowledge of the Christian doctrine they became apologists to defend their Messiah and Savior. Paul trained each of his congregations to be a center of light to shine in darkness around them (Phil.2:15). Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is seeking the leading of the Spirit of God to bring people to Christ in strategic places in this neighborhood and, to establish evangelistic centers of learning, nurturing and preaching of the Word of God.

Source Six: People of the Dream; Multiracial Congregations in the United States

Congregations that turned around

Now that we have seen identity with Christ in cultural complexity, and theological and sociological knowledge of the cities by Robert Linthicum, the apostolic missionary methods as outlined by Roland, we need to examine the contemporary literature how some

churches have followed these principles and, established their missionary work and church growth. Michael Emerson in his text, *People of the Dream; Multiracial Congregations in the United States*: discusses the dreams of congregations which have experienced a dramatic turnaround by embracing change and redesigning a new focus of their existence.

Emerson researched 30 congregations and especially twenty-two multiracial congregations out of which he identified seven models which are differentiated based on two factors. The impetus for change and the source of racial diversification are the two major factors which are essential to be on the right track. This path if chosen by a congregation, according to Emerson, “in becoming multiracial appears to influence its chances for long term survivability.” His case study of a declining congregation, Wilcrest Baptist Church located at Alief, Texas, is an excellent example of a declining church experiencing a complete turnaround. Some of the elders were ready to shut down the church in 1991 at this racially diversifying neighborhood and move the congregation to another whiter neighborhood. The declining membership, resistance of the pastor and a few members to embrace change, economic and social indicators etc. seemed to demand its closure but the leaders voted to stay.

Pastor Windom who had primarily instigated the move, was asked to resign and a new pastor named Dr. Rodney Woo was hired. As the son of a missionary couple with eight years of pastoral experience, the new pastor had a clear vision from God for the future of the church. The tradition bound Southern Baptist congregation was ready for a change to be a multiracial congregation for the first time in their history. Dr. Woo’s wife Sasha was the daughter of a Mexican immigrant and they were all ready to embark on a new adventure with Christ by projecting God into the community as opposed to reflecting the

community surrounding the church. 90% of the people who had voted for Rodney Woo did not know what the vision was and one of them asked for adding the letter “d” to his last name suggesting that the name “Wood” would sound better than “Woo.”

African Americans, Latinos, Asians and others who had never come to their services before started coming and after ten years the church is about 20% Black, 30% Hispanic, 42% White, 5% Asian and 3% other ethnicity.³⁵ The immigrants who attend the church at the present time are from over forty countries. The primary reason for the church becoming multiracial is its mission from theological, sociological, cultural and other perspectives. The primary purpose of their existence itself may be explained either in desiring to be multiracial or serving all people resonates the vision of the church. Emerson points out that slightly, “more than one-half of our twenty two multiracial congregations became or began multiracial because of their sense of mission.”³⁶ Some of them reach out to any one in the neighborhood through programs or evangelism. The mission minded church meets the spiritual and social needs of the community thereby producing growth.

Wilcrest embraced change hoping to escape the closure but the impetus to change transformed into the fundamental mission of the church. Dr. Woo had the vision of a multicultural church but it required internal change of the congregation first and evangelism outside the church. Changes were slow from a dominant Anglo church to a multiracial church. Between 1992 and 1993 one third of the 242 new people who joined the church were non-white. The statement of faith was intentionally multiethnic as one of its components of faith. Their welcome sign, “Love in any language,” displayed at the lobby and the church vision illustrated on the logo of the bulletins captured the vision of

³⁵ Michael Emerson, *People of the Dream*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 34.

³⁶ Ibid, 55.

the church and the visitors.³⁷ Different styles of music were adopted and some people left because of inability to cope with the change. Today the church is stronger than ever living out its primary vision of a multiethnic congregation.

Vision of the church demonstrated by the new pastor of Wilcrest Baptist Church translated into the vision of the entire congregation is, appealing to me. Pastor Windom was totally against his people getting involved in a multiethnic approach to ministry. Leadership was a problem but it was very critical at Wilcrest to tap out the potential in people and lead them into the kingdom vision thereby turning the congregation around from declining. People need to catch the purpose of the existence of the church without which the church faces conflicts from within. Declining churches like MPBC can turnaround completely by embracing the vision of Jesus for the church and by accepting the community connection.

Source Seven: Breakout Churches

Churches with great leadership but requiring a turnaround

What about the churches where leadership is not the problem but they still need a turnaround? We need to examine the text, *Breakout Churches*, by Thomas Rainer for answers to this question. Rainer examined thirteen churches which had been declining but experienced the turn around. He calls the identifiable point at which the significant point of growth took place, breakout point which turned around thirteen churches. Also, he compared thirteen other churches which did not turn around at the same point of transition which triggered the transformation in the successful churches. One of Rainer's research criteria is to have the same leadership and still find the much needed turnaround. Rainer

³⁷ Ibid, 67.

points out that there are, “not enough, “breakout pastors” to lead even 5% of the churches in America.”³⁸

One of Rainer’s illuminating case studies is about Temple Church, a national Baptist congregation in Nashville, Tennessee. It deals with the blinded vision of the people and not of the pastor. Michael Graves had a vision from God of a growing church reaching across multiple racial and ethnic lines. It was a time of crisis for the pastor in 1985 when he proposed a construction of a 2500–seat sanctuary based on relevant facts that multiple services were not successful to facilitate the growth process relating to the vision and the need in the community. Resistance from 300 people was critical. Their point of contention was that their church status with the middle class and upper middle class would be lost, if Hispanic and other ethnic minorities were included. They did not want a change and that they would stop supporting the church financially if the pastor did not give up his vision of reaching the community around them.

It was very painful but the opponents could not intimidate the pastor. Attendance dropped down 30% from its high of 1000 in 1985. The pastor’s pain, health-breakdown and despair leading to hospitalization prompted advice from his physician to leave the church and ministry. However, this situation did not persuade him to let go off the vision. The church recovered and growth began to accelerate to the point that the average attendance in 2003 exceeded 2000. They have counseling ministry, TV ministry, prison ministry and various other ministries totaling more than fifty ministries to reach the community today. The pastor’s vision for a change to reach the community cross-culturally had to be implemented at great cost. Leaders have to listen to God and make a

³⁸ Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 21.

stand despite resistance from within the congregation for the Holy Spirit to turn the situation around gradually.

While dealing with different types of leaders, Rainer singles out the topmost leader by naming him/her as the legacy leader of Acts 6/7. Legacy leaders have a burden for a successful ministry even after they are gone, but the number is less than 1%.³⁹ Healthy churches that last long are a critical need, but according to the author, “eight out of ten of the approximately 400,000 churches are declining or have reached plateau. Acts 6/7 leadership is desperately needed.”⁴⁰ Rainer observes eight keys to Acts 6/7 leadership, which are fierce biblical faithfulness, tenure, confident humility, acceptance of responsibility, unconditional love for the people, persistence, the outwardly focused vision and a desire for a lasting legacy.

While critiquing the book relating to this thesis project, I find it interesting that vision for outreach is one of the important aspects of revitalization, and that a legacy leader cannot be one without vision even if he /she has all the characteristics of this supreme quality of lasting leadership. Rainer has been influenced by Jim Collins in writing his book.

Second Foundational Sources

³⁹ Ibid, 45.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 45.

Source Eight: Good to Great; Why Some Companies Make The Leap-And Others Don't

Breakout point of the businesses

Having examined the importance of the vision of a legacy leader along with all other characteristics as observed by Rainer, we need to turn to Jim Collins work, *Good To Great: Why Some Companies Make The Leap-And Others Don't* to examine the transition or breakout point of the successful businesses which he has researched and especially relating to the vision of a leader. Secular companies may shed some light on leaders and their leadership styles, which in turn will help us in our understanding of the leadership vision for a change

Collins examines the description of the multiple pieces of the build up-to-fly wheel pattern in which each piece works like in a system reinforcing the other parts of the system to form an integrated whole. The integrated whole works synergistically and more powerfully than the sum of the parts. The concept of turning the fly wheel is simple but it requires consistent turning in the same direction until the spinning gains momentum resulting in people understanding the basic pattern of action, “accumulating momentum, turn by turn of the fly wheel-until build up transformed into breakthrough.”⁴¹ Once when the leader keeps turning the wheel consistent with his vision, people will line up behind that vision.

Collins observes that the principles of consistency, coherence and confidence will help people follow the vision without resistance to change. He cites Nucor as an example of turning the flywheel in 1965 after discovering that Nucor people could make steel better

⁴¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 172.

and cheaper than any one else. They took two decades but Nucor, “kept pushing the flywheel, eventually generating greater profits than any other steel company on the Fortune 1000 list.”⁴² All the eleven companies which made the advancement from good to great learned to build up and breakthrough. It was not an overnight success. While commenting on it Collins asserts, “Good to great comes about by a cumulative process—step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn—that adds up to sustained and spectacular results.”⁴³

Good to great companies have a fundamental understanding which Collins calls, “hedgehog concept.”⁴⁴ It is the intersection of three circles: what the company is deeply passionate about, what the company can do the best in the world and what drives the company’s economic engine. Core competence is good, but capacity to be the best is needed to become great. There may be activities in which the company could become the best in the world, but it may not have current competence in them. Wal-mart had the capacity and competence to become great, right from the beginning. Sam Walton took 25 years to grow from a single dime store to a chain of 38 stores and, from 1970 to 2000 as Collins points out, “Wal-mart hit breakthrough momentum and exploded to over 3,000 stores with over \$150,000 (yes, billion) in revenues.”⁴⁵ Sam Walton did not transform suddenly, an established company as a CEO from good to great but he had the same basic idea of incremental buildup leading to a hedgehog concept, followed by a breakthrough momentum in the flywheel.

⁴² Ibid,177.

⁴³ Ibid,165.

⁴⁴ Ibid,118.

⁴⁵ Ibid,191.

Jim Collins categorizes 5 levels of leaders starting from level one highly capable leader to level two contributing team leader, to level three competent manager, to level four effective leader to the highest level executive. Level five executives in all of the good to great companies, according to Jim Collins, possess a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. Churches need executive leadership not only for growth but for endurance of the vision as well.

Some times visions become weak after the leaders are gone. Leo Iacocca saved Chrysler in the early eighties from the brink of bankruptcy performing one of the greatest turnarounds in American business history. Iacocca produced outstanding results but it, “did not prove to be sustained and Chrysler failed to become an enduring great company.”⁴⁶

Source Nine: Prophets in the dark; how Xerox reinvented itself and beat back the Japanese

Loss of Vision

David Kearns, according to his text, *Prophets in the dark: how Xerox reinvented itself and beat back the Japanese*, reinvented in the eighties the entire company of Xerox by turning around the declining firm. He spearheaded the mission of transforming the corporate culture by adopting the total quality management style. Kearns envisioned that quality products would turn the firm around by giving them a competitive advantage. Organizational change propelled by cultural change and mastery of quality as advocated by the visionary leader, David Kearns, beat the Japanese. The restoration of Xerox as a

⁴⁶ Ibid, 30.

world-class competitor lasted for a few years. After David's retirement, his passionate vision has dissipated and Xerox has lost its world-class image.

The church as an organism can endure and sustain its vitality. The church needs to be aware of what it is passionate about, what drives its vitality and what is the best it can do in the world. The detection of the intersection of these three variables will bring the declining denominational church to redesign the vision of the church accordingly. Also, the legacy leader of the church has to make sure that the congregation has to work together as a team pushing the wheel slowly until it gains momentum to reach, not only the immediate community but the world community as well. The kingdom vision has to be aflame.

It takes time and a lot of learning. The church has to learn and continue to learn as a learning organization to see social reality, spiritual reality and all reality as an interconnected system to work efficiently without becoming counterproductive. Social reality has to be understood from a systemic standpoint. We need to turn to Peter Senge for illumination of this principle.

Source Ten: The Fifth Discipline

Seeing reality from a systemic standpoint

Peter Senge's text, *The Fifth Discipline*, sheds light on five illuminating principles to see reality from a systemic stand point. These disciplines can be applied to a declining denominational church to turn it around. There are learning disabilities which people need to overcome for the organization to acquire the competitive advantage and to become the best in the world. Foundational problems need foundational answers. There can be consistent resistance to seek fundamental solution to problems in a system. Even team

work can cause inefficiency and become a road block to attain competitive edge if there are manifestations of learning disabilities. Collective intelligence is imperative to be a learning organization and for that to happen, Senge asserts that a shift of mind which he calls, “metanoia” (repentance as used by the early Christians) is necessary. Senge deals with five disciplines as an integrated system to describe the art and practice of systems thinking. These are principles which can be applied to economic, sociological, philosophical, spiritual, political, missiological and all other complex issues in life. Senge’s Systems thinking with all its five disciplines are reflected in all the case studies, models and references throughout this project.

Systemic thinking focuses on the interrelatedness of an entity as a whole as opposed to looking at the individual pieces that make up the whole. Fragmentation does not reflect the big picture. The interrelationships of the system as a whole can bring out synergistically the larger number than the sum of the individual parts. In chapter one, we dealt with the interrelationships that exist between the church and the world from an ecological perspective. Also, chapter two illustrates the existence of interconnectedness in the biblical literature, business entities and other disciplines.

Personal Mastery focuses on reality objectively and not subjectively. Learning disability is lack of humility. Legacy leaders possess this virtue without which they cannot impart the same quality of virtue in their learning teams. Commenting on personal mastery, Senge states that personal mastery is, “the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively. As such, it is an essential corner stone of the learning

organization—the learning organization’s spiritual foundation.”⁴⁷ Looking at reality realistically is the essence of personal mastery and it is the intelligent cornerstone of a learning organization. Spiritual mastery for a child of God or a Christian leader is based on the foundational wisdom of reverence for God. Personal mastery is imperative for leaders to turn a declining church around and continue to keep it on the learning track.

Mental Models cause a mind set that allows people to make assumptions and think in a certain way. Senge points out, “mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.”⁴⁸ Looking at the world from one’s own perspective is parochialism, very limited without incorporating collective intelligence. Internalization of the world has to be balanced with external influences. Mental models keep a declining church continuing their decline. Only when tradition-bound Euro-Americans and others stop thinking of people differently as isolated groups, and start thinking of them from God’s perspective will the declining churches turnaround. Our mental picture of people needs to be shaped by the influence of the Spirit of God to portray the Master’s multinational picture of God’s kingdom. By developing the mind of Christ, leaders must be able to turn around a declining congregation and minister the gospel to people of all nationalities, and invite them into the church.

Building Shared Vision speaks of members of an organization as possessing a collective ownership of a vision. This is opposed to receiving a vision which the upper level management has handed down to them. Envisioning future collectively as Senge points out fosters, “genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance. In

⁴⁷ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 7.

mastering this discipline, leaders learn the counter productiveness of trying to dictate a vision, no matter how heartfelt.”⁴⁹ People exceed as a learning organization in an environment in which they have aspirations to do without being told to do. Churches become counterproductive if the leadership gives the vision and expects the members to comply with it. People, however few in number, can turnaround a declining church if they collectively and authentically own a vision for the future of the church.

Team Learning emphasizes coordinated action based on collective intelligence. Teams can embrace dialogue by brainstorming and suspending assumptions. This “thinking together” is just like the Greeks practiced. According to Senge, “dia-logos meant a free-flowing of meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually.”⁵⁰ This thesis has been the result of team learning throughout.

With all the controls in place and all the disciplines faithfully adhered to, the church can resist decline in the future and reach its highest potential for the glory of God. Enhancement of capacities for creativity and innovation can build an organization. The objective of mastering all the five disciplines of systems thinking is not to, “create the learning organization but rather a new wave of experimentation and advancement.”⁵¹ Dialogue is critical both inside and outside the declining church to learn everything about the causes of decline, before making a comeback. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church can advance as its members practice dialogue and, maximize their capacities creatively for innovation and advancement which in turn will prevent the church from declining in the future.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 10.

⁵¹ Ibid, 11.

Systems-thinking is the fifth discipline. It develops all the five disciplines as an ensemble and, “it continually reminds us that the whole can exceed the sum of its parts.”⁵² By integrating and enhancing each of the other disciplines, systems-thinking demonstrates the imperative for all the other four disciplines to work together. All these five disciplines are critical to turnaround a declining denominational church such as MPBC. By building a shared vision the church can make a long term commitment. Mental models focus on the openness needed for the church members to perceive and alter the mistaken way of seeing the ministry to the community at Mount Pleasant and the surrounding neighborhoods. Learning together as a congregation can foster the development of various skills of people and to look for the big picture without asserting individual perspectives. Personal mastery fosters leadership motivation to focus on right actions and to influence the community in the desired direction. Systems thinking can trigger MPBC to see it connected to the world and, with a shift of mind (metanoia) see itself creating the spiritual and social reality. Where do we start? MPBC is located in the context of the city of Providence. Harvie M.Conn and Manuel Ortiz answer this question by pointing the Christian church to the Kingdom, the City and the people of God.

Source Eleven: The Urban Ministry

The kingdom, the city and the people of God

Conn and Ortiz deal with the international picture of the urban history and demographics. They explain what the Almighty God has been actually doing in all the cities of the world. Their objective is to illuminate the people of God to gain a vision of the city from God’s perspective and work with God in bringing a transformation of the city.

⁵² Ibid, 12.

God is concerned about the cities of the world just like He was concerned about several cities like Nineva. World cities today have similar problems and issues which were present during the biblical times. God's solutions for these issues and problems of the cities today are the same just like they were before. Biblical strategies and answers are valuable for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ to be adopted and practiced before the fullness of the reign of Christ.

The church does not have a complete understanding of the city. Problems and intricacies of the city are mind boggling but the Spirit of God helps His people as they attempt to comprehend the cities. The authors point out the complexities of the city from a sociological context. The sociological sciences have to be applied before the church could start doing missionary work. Anthropology and sociology shed light on cultures and societies which in turn could help missionaries and urban practitioners to serve un-reached peoples of the world with the gospel of Christ. The church is expected to embrace the poor in every neglected area of the world and serve them. It is not an option but a command to serve God by taking care of them. God is still concerned about the poor as He has always been. The values and dignities of the poor people need to be viewed from the kingdom perspective. Church leaders have to follow God's vision for the poor. Kingdom ministries are not possible if leadership of the church neglect to preach and live the complete counsel of God. The message of reconciliation has to reach the poor and all down trodden people in the cities of the world. Ministerial leaders have to accept ministry to the poor in the city as a command from God and practice the gospel by helping them. Sociology without theology is incomplete because humanitarianism is not the biblical answer. God's people have to bring justice to the poor in societies where systems are in

place to oppress the victims without deliverance. How are we going to do that? Dr. Villafañe approaches ministry to the city from a holistic standpoint and answers vital questions in his text, *Seek the Peace of the City*.

Source Twelve: Seek the Peace of the City

The role of the church in the city

God has placed MPBC in the context of the city. Dr. Villafañe is of the view that the church has to be an integral part of the city to serve the city with the Gospel of Christ just like Jeremiah reflected and uttered with the evangelistic passion, “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7). Dr. Villafañe asserts that the Jeremiah paradigm of the city depicts the role of the church in the city today, with its presence, peace and prayer for a powerful impact on the city. “The church is an instrument, a servant, of peace, in the city. It preaches and lives out the shalom in the city.”⁵³ Shalom is an applicable tool or agent to bring harmony to both individual and social factors of life in the city, and the prayer of the called out ones will withstand the principalities and powers of darkness while nurturing the continuous growth of the city spirituality. There is a cosmic and structural sin and evil in the world with which the church has to encounter by taking a stand against them, and not to defeat the principalities and powers of darkness because it is the work of Christ.

The impact of the city goes in concentric circles both in the region and beyond. When churches die, they affect both the region and beyond thus making it imperative that

⁵³ Eldin, Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 3.

the mission of the church should concentrate in the city first, then to the region and beyond just like the Apostle Paul did in the New Testament.⁵⁴ Inter relational systems operating within the city socially, politically, spiritually etc. cause the complexity of the system, requiring the systemic solution to problems in the system. Fundamental problems in the system require fundamental solutions and not linear solutions which can be counterproductive in the long run.⁵⁵ God had a plan for the city and Jeremiah had to make an announcement of the plan to the Israelites for their deliverance and prosperity. They would prosper only when the city prospered. God has a plan for the city of Providence. His plan has to be executed. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church has to seek the peace of the city and keep praying because it is neither by might nor by power but by His Spirit the turnaround will happen both for the city and the church.

⁵⁴ Douglas Hall, Gordon–Conwell Theological Seminary Class Lecture (Boston, MA). *Theological Education in the urban Context*, October 6, 2003).

⁵⁵ Douglas Hall, Gordon–Conwell Theological Seminary Class Lecture (Boston, MA). *Systems Thinking and the Urban Church*, September 22, 2003)

CHAPTER FOUR

ENGAGING IN A MISSION OF RECONCILIATION TO WORK TOWARD AN INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY OF MULTINATIONAL CONGREGATION AND RECONCILIATION

Introduction to Incarnational Theology

Incarnational theology speaks of the personification and principles of God, who had to take the human form to save humanity from sin with all its ramifications. Jesus said that the purpose of His coming to this world was, “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). His plan of salvation includes both the Jews and the Gentiles (Non Jews). His incarnation was for the entire globe. The Church is a visible body under the authority of Christ and in submission to one another. United to the Head means united to all the members at the same time.

I will be using in this section four texts, *Missionary Methods* by Roland Allen, *City of God City of Satan* by Robert Linthicum, *Exclusion and Embrace* by Miroslav Volf, *Seek the Peace of the City* by Eldin Villafañe and, *Urban Ministry* by Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz. Also, I will be referring to *The Culture of Hope* (unpublished book) by Dr. Douglas and Judy Hall and the doctoral thesis project, *Nurturing Diaspora Ministry and mission in and Through a Euro-American Majority Congregation*, by Dr. Gregg Detwiler.

Allen’s text deals with the missionary methods, principles and practices which were adopted by the Apostle Paul in the early church. I will be discussing especially the part relating to Diaspora and evangelism. Linthicum probes into the biblical theology of the

city while analyzing the hostility in the city, mission of the city and the vision of the church to win the city for the Lord. Volf explores in his text the theological explanation of identity, otherness and reconciliation. He discusses, in the context of the parable of the prodigal son, the biblical value of embracing everyone including our perpetrators without exclusion. Villafañe deals with the biblical mandate of seeking the peace of the city in the whollistic sense. He analyses the reign of God in the context of the city now and in the future. Conn and Artiz delve deeper into kingdom vision and vitality of the city. They analyze the importance of the mission of the church in reaching the city with the gospel of love and reconciliation. Dr. Doug and Judy Hall discuss the importance of doing the bible in the city from theological, sociological and systemic standpoints to influence the region and beyond. Dr. Gregg Detwiler deals with ministry and mission to the Diaspora people groups, and the biblical mandate to reach them for the kingdom of God. All of the authors mentioned above, have informed so much to my understanding of Diaspora and evangelism in the city accomplished by the preaching of the message of the cross.

Missionary Methods

There were no churches in the four provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia prior to Paul going there to preach the gospel of Christ. The establishment of churches there was the result of his work and he completed it successfully after three missionary journeys. Paul's disciples who followed the apostle's method and principles were not exceptionally brilliant. There were other missionaries in the early church, who went about establishing churches. Paul himself was not a genius but his method has been adopted by reformers, religious, social and political leaders in every age under varied circumstances. The Apostle Paul had in his possession a supreme spirit and power with

which he ministered effectively making his method universally acceptable as a quality method. Paul had the Old Testament in Greek as opposed to the availability of the entire Bible we have today in many languages. Also, we have the advantages of modes of travel, communication, electronics and all other technological innovations which Paul did not have. We can learn from the principles of Paul's method for our purposes in the ministry today and succeed like the Apostle did. Specifically, his methods can turnaround the declining churches.

Allen points out that the apostle did not have any special advantages in the cities where his missionary work became a great success. Paul neither chose any specific strategy to establish churches nor did he have a special appeal to address a specific class of people. The first two missionary journeys did not denote any predetermined route that Paul had mapped out to follow. The Spirit of God guided him on several occasions, and at one point he was not allowed by the Spirit to go to Asia. On another occasion the Spirit of God did not permit him to go to Bithynia (Acts 16:6, 7). A vision directed him to go to Macedonia. He preached in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea until he was driven out of Macedonia.

During his third missionary journey, Paul, according to Allen, "apparently laid his plans and executed them as they were designed so far as Ephesus, but after that he was so uncertain in his movements as to lay himself open to an accusation of vacillation."⁵⁶ Paul's theory of evangelizing a province was not to preach in every place in it himself, but to establish centers of Christian life in two or three important places from which the knowledge might spread into the country around. He planted churches in cities or towns

⁵⁶ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 11.

which were centers of Roman government, of Greek civilization, of Jewish influence and of commercial importance. The Greek language was spoken in those provinces, which helped him to communicate his messages in Greek. Paul was able to see the importance of urban centers and he seized those places strategically.

Allen is of the view that the social, political and moral conditions of the provinces where Paul ministered are very similar to what they are today in the cities around the world. The converts of Paul had a background not better, but in some cases worse than the converts have in heathen countries today. Idolatry, superstition, belief in demons and other demoniac activities gave Paul the opening to exalt the sovereignty of the living Christ. There were cults claiming as saviors with a strong hold on people who needed to be exposed to the message of Christ. Occult practices of omens, the magical love – potions, epitaphs on children carried away by spiritual beings etc. were examples of the demoniac influence on people to whom Paul was sent to bring deliverance. Paul focused on bringing people to salvation and to turn them from darkness to light. The power of God was present to save people and it was a welcoming message, as it is today.

Philosophical teachings had their influence in confusing people with ideas relating to the separation of soul and the body, the importance of the spirit, division between God and the world, material and the immaterial, the flesh and death, and redemption based on knowledge etc. The Greek society was founded on marriage but Asia Minor was not. The religion of Asia Minor was based on free life. It was an adopted, “principle that all organized and settled social life on the basis of marriage was an outrage on the free, unfettered life of nature, the type of which was found in the favorites of the great

goddesses, the wild animals of the fields and the mountains.”⁵⁷ Eastern mysticism (abstract philosophy on creation, salvation and connection to the impersonal deities as opposed to the one living God) is creeping into the churches in the form of meditation (silent prayer) explaining away redemption. The sanctity of marriage today has been challenged in churches, with the same sex issues rocking many American Baptist churches.

Apart from superstition and uncleanness, there were wide spread issues of slavery and inhuman violence in the amphitheatre. There were people who enjoyed imaginatively aesthetic pleasure while watching cruelty and violence in the name of sport. Horror movies in America today are in every DVD and in other forms of communication to attract, and corrupt the minds of young people eventually getting them numbed to bloodshed and violence.

Slavery was well accepted during the time of Paul. There were two classes of people with one group of men who had rights and the other who had none. Caesar and his freed men colonized Corinth. The society was built upon slaves and slavery spread every where. Women, boys and girls had no rights of their own. The master’s will was dominant over everything else. The question of slavery occupied the early church but they looked at it neither with hostility nor friendliness. Some people who have adopted USA as their home land are living in Providence, Rhode Island, but their lives are miserable. Some immigrants are mistreated in their menial jobs and they do not have a voice since they speak very little English. There are illegal aliens living in the neighborhoods and their lives are worse. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church has just started to reach these people.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 36.

What are the implications of the use of miracles, Paul's finance and the content of his message? Miracles took place in the ministry of Paul but not to induce people to accept the Gospel. Signs, "wonders and mighty works" were recorded in Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:12). Allen is of the view that Paul, "did not attract people to listen to him with a view to being healed of disease or the promise of healing. It seems St. Luke was careful to avoid producing the impression that miraculous powers might be used to attract people to accept Christianity because of the benefits which they might receive from it."⁵⁸

Miracles attracted the hearers of Paul and prepared him for the preaching of the gospel. Signs and wonders at Iconium were a witness authenticated by the word of God's grace. The admission of gentiles into the church was supported with the evidence of miracles performed by God to the gentiles. The apostles discussed this matter at the Council held at Jerusalem. Allen points out, "miracles were illustrations of the character of the new religion. They were sermons in act. They set forth in unmistakable terms two of its fundamental doctrines, the doctrine of charity, and the doctrine of salvation, of release from the bondage of sin and the power of the devil."⁵⁹ Allen's observation of miracles in Paul's ministry is significant for this thesis project. Immigrants and illegal aliens in some local churches in Providence have been given promises of help with immigration, jobs etc. which are allurements to get them into the churches. No allurement or inducement is needed for conversion of people.

There were magicians at the time of Paul, who demanded much money with a false promise to perform healing and miracles which never happened. When God used Paul to perform miracles in the Name of Jesus the people did not have to pay for them, which

⁵⁸Ibid, 42.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 42.

demonstrated the doctrine of charity. Paul was very careful in his preaching without raising finances for supporting himself. He did not seek to cause any type of scandal in this very important aspect of his ministry. There were heathen teachers who went around collecting money from those who would come to their meetings demonstrating themselves as traders of philosophy and religion.

Allen observes that there were Christians who had to make a living on preaching, which Paul accepted as a legitimate reason to receive support. Paul did not want to burden any one but demonstrated his fatherly love to his disciples and converts thereby living as an example of quiet work. He did not make money by preaching but supported himself by laboring with his own hands. He pointed out, “I coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak” (Acts 20:33-35).

Paul was able to live with or without abundance. Allen asserts, “He received money but not from those to whom he was preaching. He refused to do anything from which it might appear that he came to receive, that his object was to make money.”⁶⁰

When he was forced to be in dire need he had no complaints, and this he did for the sake of the gospel. Paul did receive gifts from his converts and welcomed the idea. Philippians sent help for his necessities, “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only, for even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account”

⁶⁰ Ibid, 51.

(Philippians 4:15-17). What an example that ministers of the Gospel can imitate if possible!

Allen points out, “That one church should depend upon another for the supply of its ordinary expenses as a church, or even a part of them, would have seemed incredible in the Four Provinces.”⁶¹ Paul did neither receive money from his converts nor did he take support for financial support to his converts. He made sure that every church in every province was financially independent. He instructed the church of Galatia to take care of the teachers. Every church was exhorted to take care of the poor and the needy. The collection which he took for the poor saints in Jerusalem had nothing to do with church finance but it was meant to strategically demonstrate proof of brotherly love in maintaining the unity of the church. It is encouraging to me to see that Mount Pleasant Baptist Church can become indigenous and can help planting indigenously supporting churches.

What was the message did he preach that appealed to his hearers? Paul was aware of the context in which he had to minister to the Jews in the synagogues by building upon the past history of Israel, accepting the revelation of God to the Fathers and completing the historical revelation in the coming of the Messiah. The revelation was divinely orchestrated with a historical preparation to the ultimate fulfillment of the advent of the Messiah. It was contextual comprehension on the part of Paul. This contextual comprehension is needed regardless of the people to whom ministers or Christian workers make the presentation of the gospel.

Paul was able to present boldly the facts of the birth, rejection, and crucifixion as the fulfillment of the prophecy thus making it part of the argument of the truth of his message.

⁶¹ Ibid, 52.

Finally he referred to the most compelling proof of the resurrection of the Messiah as fulfillment of the prophecy, foretold by the prophets and witnessed by the apostles themselves. Having made a very clear presentation of the gospel, Paul would now make an appeal to all those who had heard the message to promptly consider responding to the truth in receiving the Messiah failing which they had to face dire consequences.

Allen observes that Paul's speeches at Antioch and Lystra are, "illustrations of Paul's characteristic approach to men and of his wonderful adaptability to changing circumstances."⁶² The characteristics of his approach reveal conciliatoriness and sympathy with the condition of his hearers, courage in the open acknowledgement of the difficulties which were unavoidable, respect in apologetically and respectfully making the presentation of suitable evidence to his hearers and an extraordinary faith in the message itself to save the lost souls. Paul was able to acknowledge the fact that the break for the Jews to receive the message was internal only but to the gentiles, the break from idolatrous and all other religious practices was a must.

Paul never deviated from the basic elements of the gospel which could be seen in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, in all his sermons and in all the messages in the book of Acts except for answers to objections to the gospel with ample proof. Allen attests to the fact that Paul covered all the fundamental facts like, "the nature of God, one living, personal, loving; the facts of the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the death, the resurrection; their meaning and their power to supply the spiritual needs of men; the folly of idolatry; the way of salvation : repentance and faith; the doctrine of the kingdom; the

⁶² Ibid, 66.

nearness of judgment: all are there, not one is omitted, and they form one connected whole of extraordinary power.”⁶³

Paul was called by God to make gospel persuasion without doctrinal omission. Some American Baptists have deviated from the apostolic doctrine and watered down the message to appeal to people. Hesitating to speak on regeneration, denouncement of idolatry, sinfulness of compromising with heathen practices etc., many American Baptist churches have lost the sense of the Divine Judge standing at the door and the impending wrath of God against the Christ rejecters. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church has not boldly proclaimed the message in its entirety leading to the decline in the end. Preachers have to be called by God in the first place to minister to people, which is a fundamental problem in our churches today. Only then, preachers can preach the gospel exactly like Paul did with conviction to succeed like he did in getting people convicted of sin leading to repentance and redemption.

Allen asserts, “St. Paul did not scatter seeds, he planted. He so dealt with his hearers that he brought them speedily and directly to a point of decision, and then he demanded of them that they should make a choice and act on their choice.”⁶⁴ Faith and the anointing of the Holy Spirit ought to be manifested in the preaching of the gospel, and this was evident in the ministry of Paul. Decisions were made following the preaching of the gospel. Most preachers scatter the seeds rather casually. Churches decline because of this casual method of sowing. Paul did not preach expecting intellectual response but conviction leading to a moral and spiritual change. Shaking the dust off of the feet is an admonition from Jesus if the gospel is rejected repeatedly (Matt.10:14). People have to judge themselves either

⁶³ Ibid, 69.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 74.

worthy or unworthy of eternal life by responding morally to the seriousness of the gospel. If this element is not included the essence of preaching the gospel is incomplete.

Paul's preaching was not individualistic only but was, both individualistic and socialistic. Allen points out, "St. Paul's preaching ever appealed to and demanded the exercise of the two highest and deepest convictions of men, their sense of individual responsibility and their sense of social communion with their fellows."⁶⁵ He came to the field as the Apostle of the Kingdom of God on the earth. As an Apostle of the Church of God, his objective was not to receive individuals from the heathen but to gather them into the spiritual organism and social organization of which he was a member. Regeneration followed by baptism after which men and women were admitted into a visible social structure for sharing the sacraments, discipleship, evangelism and possibly persecution for the sake of the gospel. Churches should not neglect these elements of the responsibility to both the believers on the one side and to the society on the other. Invitation into the Body of Christ exposes an individual to membership with all its glory, privileges, burdens and shame.

What are the methods of his discipleship training, and teaching relating to baptism and ordination?

Paul was able to implement repentance and faith as requirements for baptism. The whole church was encouraged to take mutual responsibility to accept converts into the church, including the delegated authority of the church to ordain the elders in the church. Paul selected elders initially in each of the churches in the four provinces from those converts, based on their high moral and social position. The training which the elders had

⁶⁵ Ibid, 76.

received from Paul was sufficient for them to make a responsible choice of future candidates for ordination when Paul was away. They were aware of the importance of ordination for vitality and expansion. The church could work out the simplest practical training that Paul had left with them to be developed further and acted upon in the most efficient manner. He was always there in the background to encourage them by writing letters, sending messengers and occasionally making personal visits. Training is vital today and the trained new converts must be willing to train others for church growth.

Are there organizational methodologies of approach that Paul used to inculcate discipline and unity in the church? Paul did not assert his authority as an autocratic leader but laid down general principles. Occasionally he had to set up a court of witnesses to confront those who had resisted his God-given authority only to emphasize a spirit of appeal. He appealed to the people to surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit to be delivered from the lusts of the flesh. Rebellion is the rejection of the work of the Spirit. He was very specific in admonishing the church to avoid the company of those who were disobedient with a view that their avoidance would convict the offender for repentance and restoration. He disagreed with those who sued their brethren in the heathen courts but made his points clear about their inconsistency between their conduct and their position as Christians. He admonished them to work but not to eat those things which were offered to the idols.

The church was expected to work as a team to correct any problem relating to spiritual matters without becoming a legislating organization. The discipline of excommunication against the offender at Corinth resulted in repentance and restoration. Paul did not take the elders of the church into task because of a member committing an

offence. His apostolic influence was meant to stir up the conscience of the church. He disciplined the church to learn the principles and left them by faith to be guided by the Holy Spirit to further help them. Declining churches have had a history of autocratic and legislating leadership.

The Church was prior to the churches. The Church is a single entity. The Church had already been there even before Christ became incarnate. He is the head and founder of His Church. He was in the wilderness with the people of Israel. Stephen, before his martyrdom, pointed out, “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us”(Acts 7:38). Allen observes, “The churches did not make up the churches, but the Church established the churches.”⁶⁶ Paul recognized the one true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke of the churches of Macedonia, of Achaia, of Galatia, of Syria, and of Asia as unities. It was spiritual communion which united the individual converts, the city churches and the provincial churches. Also, the Church is a visible body under the apostolic authority and in submission to one another. United to the Head means united to all the members at the same time. Paul recognized the fact that there were gentile converts in all four provinces. There were Jewish believers at Corinth where the gentile believers were lawless. Paul attempted genuinely to bring unity between the gentile believers and the Jewish believers under the one Head without transplanting the Judaic customs and the law. I agree with Allen on this fact because Jesus said that He would build His Church, and He did not mean churches (Matthew 16:18). The Church is His one Body.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 127.

Paul did not promote centralization of authority, and left each church to operate under its own autonomous principles. He did not define heresy or division beforehand, but blatantly refused to prejudge them despite the fact that he warned against them. Precedents do not have universal implications and Paul did not attempt to enforce them as authoritative and global principles. Spiritual unity was his emphasis as Roland identifies, “inward unity which did not express in outward unity was the negation of unity.”⁶⁷ He taught the converts in every way possible to identify and recognize the baptized Christians as brothers and sisters.

Paul was an intermediary between the Jews and the Greeks for the sake of the gospel. He encouraged mutual acts of charity as a mark of unity among the churches. All the churches in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia made the collections together and not separately to help the poor saints in Jerusalem. All the representatives went with the apostle to Jerusalem demonstrating not as members of an organization but that of an organism. That charitable action was, for Paul and all Christians an expression of intercommunication, and unity as members of an organism. Divided body is a sin against God because separation of Christians is a division of Christ. Churches need to be united under this same principle of unity. The realization that a new believer becomes part of a global network of other believers vitalizes learning teams to identify, testify and glorify Jesus.

Two great principles of Paul clearly pointed out throughout the text are the principles of preaching the gospel first and secondly, after establishing the church staying away willingly to let Christ work with the converts through His Spirit. These dynamic principles

⁶⁷ Ibid, 133.

have influenced this thesis project. When churches fail to follow them they decline. I am committed to follow these principles as the minister of the gospel.

The Apostle Paul recognized the one true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke of the churches of Macedonia, of Achaia, of Galaitia, of Syria, and of Asia as unities. It was spiritual communion which united the individual converts, the city churches and the provincial churches. Paul recognized the fact that there were gentile converts in all four provinces. There were Jewish believers at Corinth where the gentile believers were lawless. Paul attempted genuinely to bring unity between the gentile believers and the Jewish believers under the one Head without transplanting the Judaic customs and the law. Paul was led by the Spirit of God. Allen points out, “He was led as God opened the door; but wherever he was led he always found a center, and seizing upon that center, he made it a center of Christian life.”⁶⁸ Each center was an excellent example of unity between Jews and Gentiles.

The Apostle Paul did not seek individual converts although it did happen in his ministry as a missionary. The major concentration of his efforts as a missionary was to establish churches in strategic provinces from where the light of the gospel would shine throughout the region and beyond. He was acclaimed as the most successful founder of the churches the world has ever seen. He knew the fundamental aspects of the missionary work which have been neglected by churches today. In training the first converts he set the model for the future of missions. The discipleship training which Paul himself gave his early converts followed by delegated authority which he gave them to proclaim the gospel as witnesses for Christ, resulted in phenomenal success in reaping the harvest for Christ.

⁶⁸Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 17.

Churches do not grow because of the omission of this significant training of the converts for proclamation of the gospel as witnesses of the resurrected Redeemer. Converts have to share the evangelistic work with delegated authority as ambassadors of God's Kingdom, without which churches cannot grow.

Allen states, "Churches in Galatia were founded and established in the first visit."⁶⁹ Paul established each of his churches on a self-supporting basis both spiritually and financially for growth and expansion without his guidance after his departure. During his first missionary journey Paul preached at Lystra for about 5 or 6 months. He left the church in charge of the elders whom he had ordained and he was gone for about 18 months. He spent a few months in the province when he came back to Lystra and left again for 3 years after which when he came back to Lystra he stayed for a month or two.

Paul adopted a similar strategy in establishing churches in other places like Thessalonica by staying and ministering for a few months and leaving them for a long period of time. Only at Corinth, Paul ministered for a year and a half and left for three or four years. Paul, "wrote letters as to fully equipped and established church," according to Allen.⁷⁰ The Holy Spirit had prepared the hearts of the would-be-converts ahead of time to get saved at the anointed preaching of Paul. The converts had some familiarity with the Old Testament, the Jewish law and the Greek philosophy. The church planting strategy of Paul was terrific because the churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily.

Paul kept in touch with them through messengers and letter correspondence as opposed to exercising direct control and administration of these churches. Paul preached

⁶⁹ Ibid, 84.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 84.

and instructed from the Old Testament, pointing out Christ as revealed therein. The converts caught a glimpse of the reading methodology of Paul and developed further. They were like an empowered learning team to exhort one another when they met for fellowship and congregational learning. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church should implement this congregational learning to grow as a team and witness for Christ as a team.

I was brought up in India amidst a community of people separated from an exclusively segregated group of people known as the untouchables. Mahatma Gandhi called them “Harijans,” which means the people of God. During my college life prior to my conversion to Christ, I was involved in humanitarianism (helping the poor including the untouchables) as advocated by Gandhi. The teachings of Buddha (Buddhism) and Gandhi (Gandhism) began to influence me into a life style of service to the downtrodden people. I received Christ as my Lord and Savior after seeing a totally blind Hindu man receive restoration of his sight immediately after his conversion.

I went home a few months later during the summer vacation. One day, I ran into a cobbler (Harijan) whom I had known as a little boy. I enjoyed sharing with him the story of my conversion to Christ. Mr. Mottayan (his name) walked with me to our home while listening to the good news of Jesus. He sat on the floor in a corner as soon we entered our home. My mom brought tea in a cup and saucer for me. I saw a different cup (similar to Campbell soup can) given to the cobbler. I was shaken for the first time in my life to see the disparity of human treatment. I wondered why, and switched the cup abruptly. My mom was very upset with me for drinking tea from the can (meant for the untouchables) and, for giving the cup and saucer to the shoe maker. Also, I begged him to sit with me at the table. I shared the gospel of Jesus with him. Mr. Mottayan had an only son who went

to school with me. The son went to college, just like I did, far away from home. It was a tragedy that the son never came home. He could have been killed but the police was unable to solve the case. I felt the loss of his only son and extended my sympathy while sharing the gospel to this very unfortunate man. This simple demonstration of humanitarianism led to his conversion 20 years later. Inhuman treatment raised a lot of questions in my mind. Miroslav Volf states, “Ethnic otherness, is filth that must be washed away from the ethnic body, pollution that threatens the ecology of the ethnic space.”⁷¹ I was aware of mistreatment in ministry to the untouchables. I had no idea at that time about systemic/holistic theology and ministry to all people groups from God’s perspective.

I was traveling to New York in the eighties and was forced to sit in the only seat that was empty on a Greyhound bus. It was next to a Chinese gentleman. The war between China and India in 1962 resulted in animosity between the Indians and the Chinese. He turned his head away as soon as I saluted him and he sat like that for about 45 minutes. What does the Bible say about the issues with which people wrestle in this human dilemma? Is there a theological explanation for giving the gospel to selected people groups? Despite the fact that the Bible is very clear about giving the gospel to every creature, the Euro-American church has conveniently omitted its multi-dimensional approach to ministry that reaches all people. Up-reach from salvation to sanctification is well focused. Outreach has a parochial perspective because of a pre-determined narrow selection. God’s word is clear about reaching every one with the gospel of Christ regardless of their ethnicity, national origin or language barriers. This section of the project

⁷¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 57.

will deal with this very vital area of incarnational theology and the ministry of reconciliation practiced by the Christian church.

Jesus came to give His life as a ransom to save the fallen world. He was the only one born exclusively for the purpose of dying and His death on the cross was the only required atonement for sin. The cross is a miracle in itself and its mysticism is magnificent. The death of the Incarnate Christ is the good news of eternal life. Conn and Ortiz point out in, *Urban Ministry*, the Apostle Paul's missionary focus being, "Christ and his work as the incarnate good news of the gospel."⁷² The elucidation of the crucifixion in the scriptures is as mysterious as Jesus Himself was. God alone knows what He did on the cross with its unfathomable mystery, which was crystal clear in His own mind. It is obvious that Barabbas could understand the meaning of the cross on the surface. It is possible to say that my shoe maker friend, who had lost his only son, could have had a depth of experience similar even to God Himself as God had not lost His only Son. The divine tragedy belongs to the world filled with human tragedies, and the cross of Christ is most suitable to the world of people who bear crosses. The tragedy of God is the death of Christ, which is the central point of Christianity as I understand. Incarnation is the will of God, in spite of the fact, that it is the tragedy of God. God made the choice to save people in His own way. Miroslav Volf points out, "Indisputably, the self-giving love manifested on the cross and demanded by it lies at the core of the Christian faith."⁷³ The writer of the book of Hebrews states, that the purpose of the incarnation of Christ was to die as a sacrifice.⁷⁴ This

⁷² Harvey Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press 2001), 146.

⁷³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 25.

⁷⁴ "possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin. Therefore when He came into the world, He said; Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices of sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold I have come in the volume of the book it is written of Me to do Your will, O God,' " (Hebrews 10: 4-7).

passage was a quote from the Book of Psalms.⁷⁵ It was David who proclaimed prophetically the will of the Messiah to become the sacrificial sin offering.

The Apostle Peter affirms the incarnation as the plan of God. It was planned before the foundation of the world.⁷⁶ The Infinite God becoming an incarnate sacrifice for the entire human race had been in the plan even before the world was founded. It is a precious privilege to notice that we were in the mind of God, and that the Lord had chosen us even before He had created the world. We can go further to assert that not only the human race but the entire cosmos as well, was in the plan of God for redemption leading to reconciliation. Robert Linthicum asserts, “The salvation of the cosmos is not planned by God simply because the cosmos is evil. Its redemption is intended by God because it is the environment in which humanity lives and which has been sinned against by humankind.”⁷⁷

On the one side of the paradigm it is clear to see the tragedy of God but on the other, we see humanity crucified with Christ. I think of Christ’s death as the tragedy of God because of the worst humiliation that Jesus had to go through to accomplish redemption. The personification of Christ in the human form, according to the Apostle Paul, was the only available option for God to bring salvation to the fallen man.⁷⁸ God’s tragedy on the cross defines Incarnational theology. The purpose of Incarnation was for the salvation of

⁷⁵ “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears you have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require, Then I said, ‘Behold I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of Me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.’ I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly” (Psalms 40: 6-9).

⁷⁶ “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received from tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Jesus, as of a lamb without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1: 18-20).

⁷⁷ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 118.

⁷⁸ “For what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8: 3).

the entire human race from sin. The Incarnate Christ met all the conditions of the Law and all the conditions of the systems, in His death. Robert Linthicum analyses the atonement by saying, “He faced the worst of death for us; he plumbed the depths of human depravity- both individual and collective depravity. In that condescending act Christ took upon himself all that personal, corporate, and systemic evil could ever do. By taking such evil upon himself, Christ has liberated us.”⁷⁹ This analysis of the atonement of Christ serves as the best definition of the Incarnational theology.

Sin is inescapably one of the fundamental entities of the fallen humanity. Linthicum points out, “Every structure – family, the church, the community, the nation, the universe, yes the city – falls from grace, sins grievously against its Maker, and is yet so loved by him that he has provided a way to its salvation and transformation through Christ.”⁸⁰ People of various religions like Hinduism, Jainism (offshoot of Hinduism) etc. seek peace or the state of nirvana (tranquility). Buddhism seeks nirvana through the nucleus of desirelessness (eradication of all desires). The prevalence of the basic concept of sin necessitates humanity’s significant search for escape into any state, other than the one in which they are entrapped.

The law reveals the depravity of human beings, which is deplorable, accountable and condemnable. The old nature is under Adam’s headship. Commenting on transmission of sin and its deadly effect on mankind, the Apostle Paul says that every one has been condemned.⁸¹ Linthicum calls it, “the natural sinful instincts of humanity.”⁸² Humanity is

⁷⁹ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 126.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 122.

⁸¹ “Through one man’s offence judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation” (Romans 5:18).

⁸² Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 63.

guilty before God. The human hearts are desperately wicked. Volf calls the human race, “hostile community.”⁸³ Christ, our Head and supreme sacrifice (Lamb of God), nailed our fallen state to the cross that the body of sin, which is sin’s stronghold or vehicle, might be cancelled, so that the body may fight against the temptation of sin victoriously. The judgment that fell upon the human race was a summons to Jesus, who held in His hands, its interests and destinies. Christ is, therefore, the only remedy for sin.

The death of Christ was not only substitutionary but representative as well. In acting for us, He died for all, and in Him, all died. Christ carried all mankind with Him on Calvary’s cross. His death is the death of those whose sins He bore. It was neither a legal fiction, nor a federal compact, extemporized for the occasion. Christ, though the second man from heaven, was the first and the foremost in the spiritual order, to represent mankind on the cross as the root and the offspring of humanity.

God expects all human beings to receive the Savior to be redeemed. The entire human race was represented on the cross. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Him. God opens His arms of welcome to all those who would respond to His invitation, to be connected and restored to God. Volf observes, “On the cross God renews the covenant by making space for humanity in God’s self. The open arms of Christ on the cross are a sign that God does not want to be a God without the other- humanity-and suffers humanity’s violence in order to embrace it.”⁸⁴

Jesus proclaimed that the Son of Man must be lifted up, just like Moses, in the wilderness, lifted up the brazen serpent on the pole, to bring deliverance to all those who had been bitten by poisonous snakes. Those who obeyed the prophetic call of Moses and

⁸³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 100.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 154.

did take a look at the serpent on the raised pole, were healed. In the same way, the fallen race of Adam, bitten by the serpent of sin could be delivered by the crucified Savior of the world. Jesus pointed out the fundamental solution to the problem of humanity, by referring to the cross.⁸⁵ He asserted the reason for salvation was God's love and that no one should perish.⁸⁶ Everlasting life is for every reconciled person in the world and for every problem to be solved by Jesus.

Holistic theology

Incarnational theology reflects the multifarious elements which constitute the ministry to every human being, including the Diaspora people, who are living in the United States. Systemic theology speaks of the interrelatedness of the spiritual, social and physical elements of incarnation. The sinful nature of the fallen human race cannot reform the systems of the world. The sin offering made by Christ is the only option for the liberation of all systems. Linthicum attests, "The systems of God are able to liberate us from the control of the systems ordering the world. God has done what the systems could not do, because we have thoroughly and pervasively corrupted and demonized all systems."⁸⁷ Development of a holistic theology of the church mission warrants the inclusion of ministry to foreign nationals because of the fact that Jesus died for all people. This broad picture of holistic theology is foundational to do incarnational ministry from a holistic perspective.

⁸⁵ "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man must be lifted up that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3: 14-15).

⁸⁶ "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

⁸⁷ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 126.

Holistic theology speaks of the interrelationships that exist among spiritual, physical and social aspects of incarnational ministry. The English translation of Shalom for peace is inadequate because Shalom is a comprehensive word in the Old Testament. Linthicum points out, “The idea encompasses the manifold relationships of daily life, symbolizing Israel’s ideal quality life under the Law. Shalom is a state of wholeness and completeness possessed by a person or a group that includes good health, prosperity, security, justice and deep spiritual contentment.”⁸⁸ Shalom is possible based on a sound relationship with God. Application of these dimensions of shalom is holistic theology reflecting the holistic approach to ministry to the people of the world. Villafañe asserts, “If the whole church is to take the whole gospel to the whole world, it must have a wholistic spirituality.”⁸⁹ The word wholistic is more meaningful than holistic because of its reflection of wholeness and completeness. Wholistic and holistic are synonymous in the biblical sense. I have chosen the word holistic in the wholistic sense.

The cross reflects the broad vision of Jesus to save all mankind irrespective of ethnic, social, cultural, language and other barriers. This approach to Diaspora ministry reflects not only biblical reality but social reality as well.⁹⁰ The entire created order has been reconciled through the atonement of Christ. Paul includes every one and everything reconciled through Christ. The word, “world” used by John in the scripture, “God so loved the world,” is cosmos which includes the heavens, the earth, all human beings and all systems (John 3:16). It is systemic in the sense that they are all interconnected.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 86.

⁸⁹ Eldin, Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City, Reflections on Urban Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 12.

⁹⁰ “It pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth, or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:19,20).

Commenting on this scripture, Linthicum asserts, “It is referring to the redemption of the universe, the geographical world, the social systems and structure of humanity, and the entire human enterprise – in other words, the entire created order.”⁹¹ Ministry of reconciliation is to every one and everything. Diaspora ministry is part of God’s redemption plan. Systemically speaking every one and everything is interconnected in God’s program of reconciliation. Also, worshipping God becomes incomplete without accepting and acting on God’s will to save all inhabitants of the world. Internal connection to the external is not possible without internal connection to the celestial. Ministry practitioners must have a strong foundation on the bible to be effective in doing the ministry of the crucified Christ.

The Classical Characteristics of the Holistic Missionary Church

Peace with God takes place, according to Paul, when the convert gets reconciled with God and justified by faith.⁹² Peace with God speaks to me of *koinonia*- meaning fellowship with God and people. Being reconciled to God, we can be reconciled to people with God’s love, knowing that we can extend the same forgiveness to Diaspora people also. The sinner-friend is given a new title that he or she is a child of God. Not perfect of course, but is called the child of the Most High God. God forgives and forgets our sins. Volf points out, “at the center of God’s all-embracing memory there is a paradoxical monument to forgetting. It is the cross of Christ. God forgets humanity’s sin in the same way God forgives humanity’s sin: by taking sins away from humanity and placing them

⁹¹ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 120.

⁹² “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

upon God self.”⁹³ This is only the beginning because God wants to take us to a higher level than where we were when we started. We can forgive those who have offended us and forget what they have done against us. An infant has to grow and not stay in the same stage for the rest of his or her life. Our spiritual growth takes us from one stage to the other until we have the peace of God in its fullness.⁹⁴ It is this peace of God in the church that sees koinonia in the complete sense of bringing peace to all the people of the universe.

Paul referred in his epistle to Philippians about the peace of God.⁹⁵ This is the reason why we come together and pray according to the proceeding verse.⁹⁶ This we do consistently until we meet Jesus face to face. We come together to celebrate the Prince of Peace because He was chastised for our peace and that He is our peace. It is leitourgia-as we worship and celebrate our Peace-Maker. It is the vision of Jesus to have people of all nationalities, ethnicities and languages to worship Jesus in the integrated oneness of leiturgia (in spirit and in truth).

It is systemic, that koinonia and leitourgia are interconnected with diakonia and kerygma. Once when koinonia and leitourgia are in place, it is absolutely possible to be ready for diakonia- being of service to hurting people with shalom (peace of God) and kerygma –which speaks of the proclamation of the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. Diakonia is not for the hurting people of only one group, but all people groups including the Diaspora people. Villafañe asserts that evangelism should be wholistic and points out, “Shalom speaks of the mission of today’s church- a community of exiles and

⁹³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 140.

⁹⁴ “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27).

⁹⁵ “And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

⁹⁶ “Have no anxiety about anything but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6).

pilgrims. Seeking the peace of the city means to seek (1) It is Koinonia), (2) peace (welfare) of others – compassion/concern for all people, but above all for the poor and the needy (it is diakonia), and (3) peace (wholeness and harmony) – it speaks about reconciliation among races and ethnic groups and above all reconciliation with God (it is Kerygma), It is preaching, be ye reconciled to God.”⁹⁷ Peter was ready to deliver the good news of peace to Cornelius and the entire gathering in his home, leading to a dynamic transformation of Cornelius and his people (Acts 10:36). Peter would not associate before with non-Jews under any circumstances but the Lord had taught Peter not to consider non-Jews unclean, because they were part of God’s creation and that they too were entitled to receive the good news of peace for transformation. We see all the classical characteristics of the holistic and multicultural interconnectedness of koinonia, leiturgia, diakonia and kerigma in Peter’s ministry to Cornelius and his people.

Toward a Systemic Theology of Reconciliation of the world

I will be using the following texts *Exclusion and Embrace* by Miroslav Volf, *City of God City of Satan* by Robert Linthicum, *Urban Ministry* by Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, and *Missionary Methods* by Roland Allen for reference. Also, I will be using Dr. Gregg Detwiler’s Doctoral Thesis, *Nurturing Diaspora Ministry and Mission in and Through a Euro-American Majority Congregation* for reference.

Kingdom Vision of Reconciliation: The Apostle Paul refers to the reconciliation of the entire world in Christ. God has every right to demand His church to proclaim the good

⁹⁷ Eldin, Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City: Reflections on Urban Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 53.

news of reconciliation to every person in the world, since Jesus died for the entire human race. Evangelical Christians in the United States accept God's kingdom vision of reconciliation of people of all nationalities, tongues and tribes. The Apostle John had a complete picture of the kingdom design.⁹⁸ The kingdom of God is seen as the Holy City of Jerusalem with a new social order (Rev.21:1-4). Volf observes, "God's city is meant to be a refuge for all believing immigrant population."⁹⁹

During the pre-Messianic age (before the Incarnation of Christ) the good news was to the Jews, in particular, and to all the families of the earth, in the larger sense of the term. God established a covenant with Abraham.¹⁰⁰ Abraham believed in God and his faith was accounted for his righteousness (Genesis: 15:6). Faith in the Messiah was the criteria for the blessing of God to Abraham first. Jesus insisted on the need to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation to the ends of the earth.¹⁰¹ Luke speaks of the last encounter of the disciples with Jesus before his ascension, and documents His statement.¹⁰²

New Testament Vision of Reconciliation: Jesus established His church to be the instrument to reach people for His kingdom.¹⁰³ People need to be reconciled to God, and then to be brought into His church. The church, according to Jesus, is an organism comprising of people of every nation, tongue and tribe.¹⁰⁴ The church is the multi-

⁹⁸ "After these things I looked and, behold a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

⁹⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 287.

¹⁰⁰ "I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing, I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth be blessed"(Genesis 12:2-3).

¹⁰¹ "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then shall the end will come" (Matt 24:14).

¹⁰² "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

¹⁰³ "I will build My Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

¹⁰⁴ "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17).

member body of Jesus amidst the multicultural and multiethnic society (1Corinthians 12:12-13).

The Apostle Paul asserts, “Christ is all and in all,” because “there is neither Greek, nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free” (Colossians 3:11). Volf asserts, “The faith in Jesus Christ, who made our cause his cause, frees us from pursuing our interests only, and creates in us the space for the interests of others.”¹⁰⁵ Paul taught and emphasized that the church should not have a distinction between the Jews and Gentiles. He emphasized reconciliation and the oneness of the body.¹⁰⁶ People who are reconciled to Christ are the seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise. Paul emphasized this principle.¹⁰⁷ The Abrahamic covenant was extended to the Israelites and all the families of the earth. The woman who was bent over for 18 years in the synagogue was released from her infirmity and Jesus referred to her as the daughter of Abraham (Luke 13: 16). When Zacchaeus received Christ by climbing down from the tree to take Jesus to his home, the people murmured saying that Jesus was going to the home of a sinner. The tax collector promised to make restitution for all the wrongs which he had done. The Lord Jesus made the statement about the Abrahamic connection.¹⁰⁸ It is very unfortunate that the vast majority of churches in the USA are not able to worship God as a multicultural and multiethnic organism, despite the fact that they accept the Apostle John’s vision of the multi-racial congregation in heaven, worshipping God as one entity. John

¹⁰⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 215.

¹⁰⁶ “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3: 28).

¹⁰⁷ “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3: 29).

¹⁰⁸ “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham” (Luke 19: 9).

saw the tabernacle of God with men.¹⁰⁹ Commenting on the heavenly city, Volf observes, “The city has no churches.”¹¹⁰ John saw no temple in the new City of Jerusalem.¹¹¹

Cultural distinctions are not expected to be eradicated on earth now, but the transcending power of God over those distinctions must be accepted and practiced by churches.

The Church at Antioch is a phenomenal model of a holistic congregation. It had interrelationships that existed among spiritual, physical and social aspects of incarnational ministry in the church. Dr. Detwiler points out, “The church at Antioch practiced wholistic ministry,”¹¹² It was at Antioch that the followers of Christ were called Christians for the first time (Acts 11:26). Also, it was from this church that the Apostle Paul made his three missionary journeys. Scriptures do not point out specifically as to any of the apostles bringing the gospel for the first time to Antioch, but we do know that Stephen’s martyrdom in Jerusalem resulted in the persecuted Christians spreading the word everywhere including Antioch.¹¹³ The Diaspora Christians were responsible for the establishment of the largest Gentile local church at Antioch.¹¹⁴ It is very important to note that the Syrian Antioch was the third largest city of the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Preaching the gospel and, practicing the holistic ministry of wholeness and completeness led this small church to become the largest Gentile local church at Antioch.

¹⁰⁹ God “will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God”(Revelation 21:4).

¹¹⁰ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 287.

¹¹¹ “The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple in it” (Rev. 21:22).

¹¹² Dr. Greg Detwiler, *Nurturing Diaspora Ministry and Mission in and Through A Euro-American Majority Congregation*, (Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston: Doctor of Ministry Project 2001), 66.

¹¹³ “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch preaching the word to no one but Jews only” (Acts 11:19).

¹¹⁴ “Some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).

The Apostle Paul was the greatest missionary of the New Testament Church. His training and influence must have resulted in this local church becoming a great center of missionary evangelism. This Syrian Antioch Church practiced holistic and organizational principles of the body of Christ (as an organism) in such a dynamic way to be followed as a powerful New Testament model. The more I read chapters 11-18 of the Book of Acts, the more I see the following holistic entities in Antioch Church, which vividly portray the interconnectedness of kingdom vision, New Testament vision, redemptive vision and incarnational vision of the Diaspora ministry and mission. A) It was a multicultural evangelism center (Ministry to non-Jews; Acts 11:19-24), B) teaching and discipleship center (effective discipleship and numerical growth; 11:25-26), C) deaconate ministry center (ministry of the trained deacons; 11:29-30), D) organizational leadership center (leaders organized as one entity; Acts 13:1-3), E) congregational vision and worship center (praying, fasting and worshipping; 13:2-3), F) missionary outreach center (The church sent Paul on his missionary journeys from here after prayer; Silas with Paul to Syria and Cilicia; and, Barnabas and Mark to Cyprus 13:3; 15:40; 18:23), G) convention center (missionary conference on ministry to the gentiles Acts 14:27) and H) missionary referral center (11:26 Barnabas brought Paul for the first time to this church). Also, the church functioned as a fund-raising center for famine relief as response. Funds were collected and sent to the church in Jerusalem, through Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:27-30).

Dr. Detwiler observes the following elements found in the Antioch Church; cross-cultural evangelism followed by numerical growth (Acts 11:20, 21, 24), spiritual growth through teaching (11:25-26), diaconal ministry (11:29-30), organizational growth-organized body with leaders (13:1-3), a shared spiritual life-congregational worship and

fasting (13:2-3), missionary outreach (13:3;15:40;18:23) and the local missions convention (14:27).¹¹⁵

Redemptive Vision of Reconciliation: God has used the Diaspora people in His redemptive strategy to carry out His plan to touch other people in different parts of this world. “**Diaspora**” is a Greek word which means scattered. The Book of Acts describes the persecution of the church in Jerusalem, and as to how it resulted in the displacement of all the people except the apostles. Dr. Doug and Judy Hall point out that ministry done through, “Relational networks can be very rewarding, as multitudes of urban Christians that speak dozens of languages are experiencing! We are calling this diaspora missions.”¹¹⁶ It was the sovereign purpose of God to use the Diaspora instead of the apostles in spreading the Gospel to all nations (Acts 8:1- 4). People come to the cities of America because of political persecutions, disasters, poverty and various other reasons, which open up a great mission field right in our own door step. Dr. Greg Detwiler points out, “Jesus was, in a sense Diaspora person sent from heaven to seek and save the lost and to purchase men for God. Jesus accomplished His divine mission as a Diaspora person, and serves as the preeminent example to all other Diaspora saints.”¹¹⁷ Also, Detwiler reiterates, “It is also interesting to note that not only was Jesus as a Diaspora person in this heavenly sense, but also from an earthly perspective. As a child, Jesus and His family were refugees who had to flee to Egypt. Jesus can truly be said to have experienced Diaspora reality on a human level.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 66.

¹¹⁶ Dr. Douglas and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft; not yet published), 94.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 53.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 53.

The Apostle James starts his epistle addressing all the twelve tribes.¹¹⁹ Persecution was very severe and the church at Jerusalem was in trouble at the outset. Saul, before his conversion at the Damascus road, was the most feared for his persecution against the church. Only the apostles stayed back and all the people of the Jerusalem Church were scattered. Luke refers to the seriousness of the persecution against the church.¹²⁰ God's word of reconciliation had to be carried out and He used the Diaspora people to preach throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

Jesus gave the great commission to preach the gospel to every creature, but the Church at Jerusalem did not pay heed to it. Consequently, the Lord had to allow the persecution to get the church people scattered into different directions.¹²¹ Again, Luke points out the Jews as the target of the Diaspora-missionary outreach.¹²² It is clear from this passage that the gentiles (non-Jews) had not yet heard the message of reconciliation because the Diaspora attempted to reach the Jews who were living in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. God sent Peter to the household of Cornelius, directing him through a vision. Saul, after his conversion, became the most celebrated missionary to carry the word of reconciliation, to the gentiles. There were no churches in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia before AD 47 but Paul completed his missionary work by establishing many churches in AD 57. Allen authenticates the success of Paul's work and asserts, "In little more than ten years St. Paul established the Church in four provinces of the Empire, Galatia,

¹¹⁹ "James, bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: greetings" (James 1:1).

¹²⁰ "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles" (Acts 8:1).

¹²¹ "Those who were scattered (Diaspora) went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

¹²² "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only" {Acts 11:19).

Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia.”¹²³ While speaking to the people at Athens, Saul now called Paul said about the universal oneness of humanity because of the similarity of the blood.¹²⁴

God’s Use of Diaspora People in His Redemptive Strategy

Esther in the Old Testament was used mightily by God in the heathen nation of Persia. Banished with her family to this far off place, Esther became the queen. This was a strategic position to bring deliverance to her people. Mordecai, her uncle sent word to Queen Esther about the emergency and the promptness of her intervention.¹²⁵ Haman, who envied Mordecai and the Jews, plotted against them to be killed. The Lord reversed the plan of Haman through Esther’s mediation to King Ahasuerus for the deliverance of her people. Haman was hanged and Mordecai was honored.

Joseph, (also in the Old Testament) who was enslaved and sent to Egypt, rose to the highest position next to Pharaoh, to execute God’s plan of saving many lives. Joseph acknowledged the purpose of God in his life while referring to his adversity.¹²⁶ Moses demonstrated a dramatic deliverance from Egypt. Linthicum points out, “Israel’s dance of freedom included forty years in the wilderness as Moses took a collection of slaves and molded them into a nation, with a government, laws, and a faith that had the potential to keep the people perpetually free.”¹²⁷ Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were

¹²³ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 3.

¹²⁴ “He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27).

¹²⁵ “If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time like this?” (Esther 4:14).

¹²⁶ “God sent me before you to preserve posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:5).

¹²⁷ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 85.

exiled in Babylon, but God demonstrated His sovereignty through them to the King. Daniel's deliverance from the lion's den and the deliverance of the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace, demonstrated the most indomitable power of God. The King needed to acknowledge the sovereignty of God.¹²⁸

According to the book of Ezra, it was the providence of God to use three great Diaspora men, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra who had been exiled in Persia but were sent to Jerusalem to accomplish the purposes of God. Cyrus, the Persian king allowed the return of the banished Jewish people to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem. Ezra was sent to turn the Israelites from their backslidden condition, and to rebuild the Law of God in their hearts. Ezra worked with Nehemiah in bringing about several reforms. The book of Nehemiah (chapters 8-10) describes the accounts of Ezra reading the books of the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), the repentance of God's people and their reconciliation to serve their Redeemer. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show the providence of God in using both the righteous and the unrighteous to accomplish His ultimate will of reconciliation in the lives of His people.

Jesus, in the New Testament, is a perfect example of God coming from heaven to earth to redeem humanity to Him. All religions deal with the human race making attempts to go to God but in Christianity, we have God coming down to be an incarnate Redeemer.¹²⁹ Jesus came to do God's will to be sacrificed once and for all.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ "The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over whomsoever He chooses" (Daniel 5:21).

¹²⁹ "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

¹³⁰ "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all" (Hebrews 11:10).

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are filled with examples of God using the Diaspora people strategically, accomplishing His ultimate will in the lives of His people. The question arises as to whether God can still use the Diaspora people to any part or all parts of the world to carry out His purposes. The answer is positive. Dr. Detwiler asserts that the Diaspora people are, “the strategic opportunities God has set at our doorstep.”¹³¹ The entire human race is not reconciled to God and to one another. God still loves the world and He does not want any to perish. Being the unchanging Christ, He does use the Diaspora people to fulfill His purpose in His own sovereign way, everywhere. Linthicum states, “We are privileged to be an instrument of that purpose.”¹³² The Bible states that Jesus is an unchanging Christ.¹³³

A Potential Current Ministry of Reconciliation through Diaspora Peoples

There is a similar situation in Mount Pleasant and the neighborhoods, where God is using the Diaspora people. These people are ethnically diverse and have come from different parts of the world. We have people from six different countries; India, Philippines, Liberia, Jamaica, Nigeria and Puerto Rico are well represented at MPBC. Some of these people have either direct and /or extended families in those countries to be reconciled to God. I had an opportunity to speak over the phone to an aunt of a Liberian lady and led her to Christ on the phone. This Liberian lady named Beatrice (who has been

¹³¹ Dr. Greg Detwiler, *(Nurturing Diaspora Ministry and Mission in and Through A Euro-American Majority Congregation)*, (Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston: Doctor of Ministry Project 2001), 55.

¹³² Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 39.

¹³³ “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

attending this church with her family over a year) started a ministry during her recent trip to Liberia, and has invited me to make a missionary trip to Liberia, in the future. Beatrice is a great blessing to our congregation and we are working with her to reach her people for Christ. One of her Liberian friends, named Rebecca, had a stroke with the possibility that she would never walk again. Beatrice and I went to the hospital and prayed over her. Later, I saw Rebecca in Beatrice's home on the occasion of her daughter's birthday. Rebecca was full of joy to testify how she started to walk gradually after prayer, thus giving me an opportunity to speak to other people at the birthday party.

God gave me a unique privilege in 1992 to witness to a Muslim from Egypt in North Providence, RI. The Home Bible Study group was electrified to see the demonstration of the power of evangelism. The young man resisted to God's word by debating until 2AM after midnight. As soon as he entered his apartment, the Holy Spirit moved him to a point that he called loudly the name of Jesus. One day, I had to give him a ride from Providence to New York City and I played the song, "Amazing Grace" on the tape recorder. I did not speak a word about Christ but waited for the Spirit to show me what to do next. After an hour I saw tears in his eyes and wanted me to play the song again. He told me to stop the car and asked me about the meaning of his calling upon the name of Jesus in his apartment on the night of my first encounter with him about his making a decision for Christ. I pointed out the scripture relating to how a person could get saved by calling on the name of the Lord. This time he shouted again thanking Jesus for saving his soul. An Egyptian friend of mine gave him a Bible in Arabic and extended hospitality to both of us on our way back from New York. The Muslim friend (now saved) was astonished at the hospitality shown to him by God's people in Connecticut and Rhode Island. A few months

later, I took him to the JFK air port in New York and gave him the cassette that he had loved, as a parting gift before his departure for Egypt. Hospitality evangelism opened his heart to Christ as he had explained it. I was told later that I, as a Diaspora person had caught another biggest fish from Egypt. Glory to God!

Detwiler asks a very important question, “Does God still have a purpose for sending Diaspora people here and there?” and affirms, “Diaspora people provide the church both blessing and opportunity”¹³⁴ Also, we have splendid opportunities to bring the gospel to the friends and family members of those who are from other countries and living now in Providence. Why do we have to practice friendship with people who are not from our own group? Let us discuss that in the following section.

Relational/Friendship Vision of Reconciliation: The Holy Spirit is our guide and our friend. He leads us to people in strange ways, to help them and in doing so to open the door of evangelism. God has used friendship/hospitality to accomplish His plan in the Bible. It is very mysterious, but much needed in our understanding of dealing with immigrants and all foreigners living in the United States. The Israelites were once in a foreign land and were oppressed (Egypt). God required the people of Israel not to mistreat strangers living among them because they, themselves, were mistreated as slaves.¹³⁵ God commanded His people to have strangers included along with the Levites in the distribution of the offerings. Deliverance from Egypt was a celebration, and the covenant people were given a mandate to remember the reason for celebration, as they enter the

¹³⁴ Dr. Greg Detwiler, *Nurturing Diaspora Ministry and Mission in and Through A Euro-American Majority Congregation*, (Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston: Doctor of Ministry Project 2001), 54.

¹³⁵ “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9).

Promised Land, and ever after. They needed to take care of, not only the Levites and the strangers, but the widows and the fatherless as well. This requirement was explicitly stated.¹³⁶ The celebration of the Day of Jubilee was for economic and political regulation (Deut.15:1-5). It was aimed at, as Linthicum observes, “minimizing the wealth-accumulating capacity of some Israelites at the expense of the less fortunate and weaker.”¹³⁷

The requirement of looking after the Levite, along with the stranger, the fatherless and the widows, was again reiterated.¹³⁸ God’s people have to defend the poor and the church must be an advocacy for them. Linthicum points out, “The church is called to be a strong voice for those in the city who are poor and a defender of their causes. The church is called to put its body where its mouth is.”¹³⁹ It is interesting to observe that neglecting God’s command to be an advocacy for the strangers, the fatherless and the widows was considered a transgression.

The strangers or aliens living in the United States can be compared to foreign-born people, immigrants, visitors or other internationals living here. During the Old Testament times, the strangers were non-Jews and yet God required the Jews to take care of them. The Lord God delivered the Jews from the Egyptian bondage, which is a type of salvation.

¹³⁶ “You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place your God chooses to make His name abide”(Deuteronomy16:11).

¹³⁷ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 91.

¹³⁸ “So you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you. When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year- the year of tithing- and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, then you shall say before the Lord your God; I have removed the tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow according to all your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them” (Deuteronomy: 26:11-13).

¹³⁹ Ibid,174.

While celebrating salvation from the Egyptian bondage and continued covenantal blessings, the Jews were required to take care of the strangers, the fatherless and the widows. We need to apply this to our own bondage to sin from which the Lord Jesus has delivered us, coupled with the same covenantal blessing to continue for ever. God requires His people, who are saved by the blood of Christ, to take care of the strangers, the fatherless and the widows who are in the form of aliens/foreigners/foreign born-people living in this country. We are bound for His kingdom and we need to have this kingdom vision to reach the foreigners for Jesus, while treating them with compassion of reconciliation and relational evangelism. Conn and Ortiz observe in *Urban Ministry*, “The eschatological macrocosm of new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 65:17) is unveiled in the microcosm of the people of God.”¹⁴⁰

The Apostle James speaks of God’s people becoming doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22), and asserts the importance of assistance to orphans and widows.¹⁴¹ Jesus stressed the importance of His followers being the doers of the word in His imagery of the King sitting on the throne, dividing the unrighteous as goats on the left and the righteous as sheep on the right based on their service to Him when He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison. The great question would be relating to when they saw Him hungry, thirsty, as a stranger, naked, sick and in prison. The King’s answer would bring solace and shock.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Harvey Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 145.

¹⁴¹ “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

¹⁴² “Assuredly I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25: 40).

The church is expected to be of service to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, invite the strangers, clothe the poor, helping the sick and visiting those in prison. The goats on the left are identified by the King as those who have not availed their opportunities to be of service to all the above mentioned unfortunate people. They receive nothing but judgment because of their inhospitality and lack of compassion.¹⁴³ From a systemic standpoint, the Diaspora people are examples of Jesus in need to be taken care of by God's people. Service to them is friendship/relational evangelism, and advancing the message of God's kingdom. Also, ministering to and through the Diaspora people is ministering to Jesus Himself.

The ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of the Spirit just like Jesus had. Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah at the synagogue in Nazareth by opening exactly to the place where the prophet refers to the ministry of the Messiah.¹⁴⁴ This scripture can be applied as a reflection of all people in general and the Diaspora people in particular. Many of the foreign-born people, immigrants and internationals who are here are not educated. They are poor, broken hearted, oppressed and are captives being blinded by the materialistic culture. You cannot blame them for being impoverished. Conn and Ortiz assert, "It is much easier to blame the poor for being poor than to understand that we benefit from the very social, political, and economic powers that are oppressing others and making them poor."¹⁴⁵ Hospitality evangelism and relational reconciliation are possibly the only way to

¹⁴³ "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me" (Matthew 25:45).

¹⁴⁴ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because he has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 327.

minister to Christ, through these people just like the Good Samaritan did in taking care of the victim on the Jericho road.

Relational Reconciliation and Hospitality Evangelism: The essential elements of relational reconciliation and hospitality cannot be underestimated. The church should facilitate God's plan in the big picture, without becoming a hindrance to it. The Jews did not have any dealing with the Samaritans during the earthly ministry of Christ and Jesus successfully attempted to break that. Jesus had to go to Galilee after leaving Judea, but He chose deliberately to go through Samaria. He sat at Jacob's well after the disciples had gone to the city to buy bread. When a woman came to draw water, Jesus started the conversation by breaking the tradition and asking for a drink. She was shocked.¹⁴⁶ It was relational evangelism. The conversation was electrified when He offered to give her the living water which will become "a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (verse 14) She was desperate for this living water and asked Jesus for the same when He required her to call her husband. It was a prophetic revelation to her when Jesus told her all about her marriage to five husbands, excluding the present man with whom she is living without being married. Jesus responded to her question about the place of worship by referring to the prerequisite of spirit and truth to worship the Father in any place. While mentioning about her waiting for the Messiah, Jesus revealed about His true identity to her, "I, who speak to you, am He" (John 4:26). She could not wait to leave the water pot and run to bring the news about the Messiah to the people of her city.

The Samaritan woman became a terrific (Diaspora) witness by bringing several (Diaspora) people to see the Messiah. It was a powerful Diaspora mission work which

¹⁴⁶ "How is it that you being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (John 4:9).

Jesus launched. Many responded to Jesus and became believers. Jesus stayed there for two days at their request. The Good Samaritan parable, is another classic model of Diaspora mission, which has inspired hundreds of missionary organizations down the centuries (Luke 10: 30-37). Detwiler observes, “Biblical hospitality, then, is whollistic and should be practiced cross-culturally whenever possible. It involves opening our homes, our lives, and our church communities to others, ministering to them in whollistic ways.”¹⁴⁷ It is about time for the church people to be involved in evangelization. Over the years, I have used these classic models of Jesus’ relational and hospitality evangelism to lead more than 3,000 people to Christ (on a one-to-one basis) by identifying with Diaspora and other people, glorifying the Jesus of the Cross and testifying to reconciliation with the Resurrected Redeemer. It was very unfortunate that there was no follow up work in Samaria until later, when Philip went down to the city of Samaria and “preached Christ to them” (Acts 8:5). Multitudes responded to the gospel of healing, miracles and deliverance, and there “was great joy in the city” (Acts 8:6-8).

The letter to Philemon is very practical and biblical in its emphasis on relational reconciliation and hospitality. An escaped slave got imprisoned but Paul led him to Christ in the same prison where he happened to be. Being reconciled to God, Onesimus a bond slave was ready to be reconciled now to his master Philemon. Paul wrote this letter in behalf of Onesimus recommending him to be received as a brother.¹⁴⁸ Paul was willing to repay whatever Onesimus owed his master.¹⁴⁹ It is very likely that Onesimus must have

¹⁴⁷ Dr. Greg Detwiler, *Nurturing Diaspora Ministry and Mission in and Through A Euro-American Majority Congregation*, (Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston: Doctor of Ministry Project, 2001), 63.

¹⁴⁸ “No longer as a slave but more than a slave-a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (Philemon 16).

¹⁴⁹ “If he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account” (Phil.:18).

stolen money or something important that led to his running away. It was the Roman law that the slaves did not have any rights. There was mistreatment and oppression of the slaves but Christians, like Paul, who did not condone slavery had to treat them with compassion, love and hospitality. This incident is an excellent example of relational evangelism practiced by Paul, leading to reconciliation of a sinner to God and the human race.

The Book of Acts is filled with examples of how the Early Church practiced relational evangelism and hospitality. The believers attempted to live in one accord and united hearts. No one was left to suffer from economical deficiencies. This approach to live a sacrificial life led to their selling everything and bringing the proceeds of the sale to the apostles for sharing the money with the needy (Acts 4:34-37). Their intention was to share the gospel and their possessions so that people could get reconciled to God and people. As the number of disciples kept increasing their relational reconciliation and hospitality, was extended to Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) and other cultures. Stephen, the first martyr was one of the seven chosen for administering the daily distribution to the poor and needy.

The Apostle Paul trained each of his churches, which he established in the four provinces, to become independent financially. Work ethic was part of his teaching to all his churches, to finance themselves individually without depending on aid from outside. He collected money from his churches to support the poor saints in Jerusalem when there was an occasion to prove to the Jewish believers of Jerusalem that converts from Gentiles had a significant part to play for the oneness of the body of Christ. It was relational reconciliation on the one side and, compassion and hospitality on the other (1Corinthians 16:1, 11 Cor.8: 4, Romans 15:25-27). Jewish believers and Gentile believers, becoming

one in Christ, is the totality of God's redemptive reconciliation. Linthicum asserts, "The evidence of authentic Christianity is community, in which the barriers that normally separate people have been overwhelmed and negated by the redeeming power of Christ."¹⁵⁰

Paul's teaching on the qualifications of a bishop includes hospitality, along with other characteristics. Hospitality and relational reconciliation have been practiced for several centuries. Being hospitable means responding quickly to the physical needs of strangers. I personally experienced this when I was lost one evening in Bridgeport, Connecticut in the eighties. As a stranger and quite new to this country, I missed the last boat for the day to return to Long Island, NY where I had been staying. Hitchhiking from one place to the other resulted in witnessing to a young man named Thomas, who gave his heart to Jesus. Also, it led me to more trouble, since I was dropped off at a place where a murder had taken place. The police came on the scene, but at my request, they took me to a local Baptist church. There was a church party that evening and I had a tremendous opportunity to witness to the unsaved people at the table. The pastor was very kind and put me in a local motel for the night. The next morning he paid the motel bill and dropped me off at the harbor with a friendly but firm warning, "Don't miss the boat." This beautiful church practiced compassion and hospitality just like the Good Samaritan did. This incident is a reminder for me and the church not to miss the boat in taking care of the strangers. Detwiler points out, "If the church is not the church and hospitality is not practiced, total redemption is hindered. While hospitality is not the 'be all, and end all' of God's plan, we

¹⁵⁰ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 259.

will make no progress in diaspora ministry and mission without it. It is the critical first step from which everything will flow.”¹⁵¹

God’s people have to realize that they are seated in heavenly places with Christ. The resurrected mind-set helps people to have the kingdom vision, and to see the world from God’s total perspective, like Paul did. It is the eternal purpose of God.¹⁵² Saved people, both Jews and Gentiles according to Paul, “are all one in Christ,” and are Abraham’s seed and, “heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 2:29). Biblically mandated hospitality and relational reconciliation becomes paramount in importance, and God’s people everywhere should look for opportunities to extend holistic services to Diaspora people living in the United States. MPBC has to concentrate on hospitality and relationship-reconciliation in Mount Pleasant and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Toward a Holistic Theology of Incarnational Reconciliation

A Paradigm for Incarnational Ministry: Jeremiah 29: 4-7

Ministry and Mission in the Urban context is exemplified by Jeremiah in this passage, which simultaneously reflects on the mission and ministry to foreign nationals, ethnic minorities and immigrants. Dr. Villafañe in his text, “*Seek the Peace of the City*,” is of the view that the church has to be an integral part of the city, to serve the city with the Gospel of Christ just like Jeremiah reflected and uttered with the evangelistic passion to seek the peace of the city.¹⁵³ Dr. Villafañe calls the holistic theology of the urban ministry with a

¹⁵¹ Dr. Greg Detwiler, *Nurturing Diaspora Ministry and Mission in and Through A Euro-American Majority Congregation*, (Emmanuel Gospel Center, Boston: Doctor of Ministry Project 2001), 61.

¹⁵² “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6).

¹⁵³ “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7).

beautiful title, “The Jeremiah Paradigm for the City.”¹⁵⁴ The Jews were in exile, at this time, as the Diaspora people and God was addressing them to carry out His plan through them. Dr. Villafañe asserts that the Jeremiah paradigm of the city depicts the role of the church in the city today, with its presence, peace and prayer for a powerful impact on the city.

The Christian church has to discover God’s larger picture of the presence, peace and prayer of His people, to achieve His objectives through missions and ministries in the cities. Let us examine each one of them in the theological context. **Diaspora Presence** was one of the three-fold purposes of God for the Jews during their banishment to the city of Babylon. Their presence in the city was for a witness. God’s presence in His people is a powerful testimony to the heathen for their reconciliation to the living God in any society. It can be called Diaspora Reconciliation-Presence. God had allowed this exile and they had to accept it and act upon the plan of God for them. They had to settle down in the city.¹⁵⁵

It was a critical necessity for the Jews to be engaged in the life of the city with its people. They did not have to try to change the circumstances, to go back home, but stay in this captivity. Their presence in the city was God’s will. Linthicum asserts, “Presence is the final authentication of urban ministry, for if the corporate life of the church and individual lives of Christians are not consistent with their practice and proclamation, their unfaithful lifestyle will invalidate all their life work and witness seeks to accomplish.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Eldin, Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City, Reflections on Urban Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 1.

¹⁵⁵ “Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters-that you may be increased there, and not diminished” (Jeremiah 29:6).

¹⁵⁶ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 186.

The presence of the church in the city is God's will and the church has to demonstrate the reconciliation presence from the holistic perspective. Jesus told His followers in His Sermon on the Mount to be productive.¹⁵⁷ Also, Jesus asserted about being the light.¹⁵⁸ God's people are sharing the light of Jesus since Jesus is not with them in a physical form.¹⁵⁹

Diaspora Peace: The second purpose of God for letting His people stay in the city was to have them illustrate the peace (shalom) of God in their lives by seeking the shalom of the city. Holistic peace can turn the hearts of people to God for reconciliation. Also, they can reconcile with one another and live in peace. I call this entity Diaspora Reconciliation-Peace. God said, "Seek the peace of the city...." (Jeremiah. 29:7). The Peace (shalom) that God's people was expected to bring to the city was meant in the holistic sense. Villafañe defines peace, "shalom speaks of wholeness, soundness, completeness, health, harmony, reconciliation, justice, welfare-both personal and social."¹⁶⁰ Isaiah spoke prophetically of perfect peace.¹⁶¹ Shalom was born when Christ was born as the Prince of Peace, to bring peace on earth. The peace of Christ is the fulfillment of the promised shalom. The Apostle Peter confirmed it when he said, "preaching peace through Jesus Christ," was initiated by the God of Israel (Acts 10:36). He summed up the ministry of the Messiah as the ministry of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶² The ministry of Christ was peace in the holistic sense.

¹⁵⁷ "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matt. 5:13).

¹⁵⁸ "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matt 5:14).

¹⁵⁹ "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

¹⁶⁰ Eldin, Villafañe, *Seek the Peace of the City, Reflections on Urban Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 3

¹⁶¹ "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for in YAH, the Lord, is everlasting strength" (Isaiah: 26:3).

¹⁶² "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10: 38).

Peter admonished the Diaspora Christians to, “seek peace and pursue it” (1Peter3:11).

Jesus promised to give His followers, “My peace” (John16:27). Again, Jesus reiterated relating to His peace for His followers.¹⁶³ The secret wound of people today is anxiety (tribulation) and the church has the answer to bring reconciliation. God’s people should be involved in the city, bringing this holistic shalom to those who desperately need it.

Linthicum advocates, “This is the biblical writers’ essential call to God’s people for urban prayer –to pray for the peace or shalom of the city.”¹⁶⁴

Diaspora Prayer: Intercessory prayer releases the power of God to strike against the systems leading the Diaspora people for reconciliation with God. It can be called Diaspora Reconciliation-Prayer. Shalom is an applicable tool or agent to bring harmony to both individual and social factors of life in the city, and the prayer of those called will withstand the principalities and powers of darkness, while nurturing the continuous growth of the spirituality of the city. The Lord told the Jews not only to seek the peace of the city but, “pray to the Lord for it,” as well (Jeremiah 29:7). God’s sovereign power would strike out the demoniac powers of the city, in answer to the intercessory prayers made in behalf of the city. There is cosmic and structural sin and evil in the world which the church has to encounter by taking a stand against them, and not to expect to completely defeat the principalities and powers of darkness, because it is the work of Christ. God’s purposes in the city can be accomplished only with the spiritual armor of prayer. Also, prayer is a foundational characteristic of spirituality. Linthicum points out, “Without prayer, ministry

¹⁶³ “These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John18:33).

¹⁶⁴ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 149.

in the city will lack the spiritual foundation upon which it must be based.”¹⁶⁵ We have discussed the three-fold cord of Diaspora Presence, Diaspora Peace and Diaspora Prayer in the theological framework of ministry and mission of the church in the city, to fulfill the larger picture of God’s plan for the city.

Diaspora Power: To Dr. Villafañe’s three points of presence, peace and prayer, I have to include the idea of power. The power of the Holy Spirit turns the Diaspora people to Christ to be reconciled. I see this activity as the Diaspora reconciliation- power. The book of Acts attests to the fact that Jesus came to this world with the different message than any one else has ever done before or after (Acts 10: 34-36). Allen observes that the Spirit of God could put a person, “for a position of authority.”¹⁶⁶ Peter opened his mouth and spoke of Jesus’ ministry as the ministry of peace.¹⁶⁷ Also, Peter refers to the ministry of Christ emphasizing that it was the work of the Spirit.¹⁶⁸ The ministry of the Spirit is the ministry of power especially in the context of the Diaspora people. I would like to call it the Diaspora reconciliation-power.¹⁶⁹ Jesus offered the Living Water to the Samaritan woman and deliverance to the daughter of a Syrophoenician (half Syrian and half Phoenician) woman with the apostles, bringing deliverance to both Jews and the gentiles in the New Testament ministry (Mark 7:26).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid,186.

¹⁶⁶ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, (Grand Rapids: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 143.

¹⁶⁷ “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. You know the word He sent to Israel, preaching the good news of peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)” (Acts: 10:36).

¹⁶⁸ “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

¹⁶⁹ “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

I personally witnessed the power in the name of Jesus over the demons.¹⁷⁰ Allen points out the importance of baptism by saying, “The moment they are baptized they are the Temple of the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost is power.”¹⁷¹ A Hindu woman in Malaysia was demon-possessed and had been lying on the floor for three days in the worst condition. It was after midnight when I rebuked the demons to leave her in the name of Jesus Christ; she was set free. She began to thank Jesus immediately after the demons were cast out. The demons had to obey and leave at the name above all names. She received Christ as Lord and Savior. A couple of other Hindu young men received Christ when they witnessed the power of God in demonstration.

On another occasion, some Moslems received Christ as Lord and Savior, in a home in India, after they saw a woman delivered from demon possession. I realized the power in the name of Jesus, when I found out that there was another Moslem woman delivered at the same time, three houses down the road. It was like double play in base ball. I have seen many times, in different parts of the world, people being delivered from demons, resulting in salvation. Some times Diaspora evangelism cannot be done until we are, “endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). I ministered to the Native Americans in New Mexico for 14 years and saw people delivered from satanic ritualism, occultism and possession. I could have never ministered to them without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Daniel relied on the power of God for 21 days of fasting and praying, until Michael the archangel was dispatched by God to handle the Prince of Persia (Daniel 10:13). Nebuchadnezzar had to write a decree and bless God by saying, “Blessed be the God of

¹⁷⁰ “Behold, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10: 19).

¹⁷¹ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, (Grand Rapids: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 146.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego,” after seeing them delivered from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:28). After Daniel was delivered from the lion’s den, King Darius wrote a decree.¹⁷² Daniel was dependent on God’s power to guide him to fear God first at the risk of even resisting the authority of the king. Allen observes in the New Testament context, “The Holy Ghost is given to Christians that He may guide them, and that they may learn His power to guide them, not that they may be stupidly obedient to the voice of authority.”¹⁷³

Paul warns us to rely on spiritual weapons and insists that our warfare is not with human beings but with diabolical powers and those who are influenced by these powers.¹⁷⁴ Demons are subject to us at the mention of the name of Jesus, when we live out His name. The power of God is needed for Diaspora evangelism, but we should rejoice because our, “names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

As Apostle Peter was addressing the household of Cornelius with the superb guidance of the Spirit of God as recorded in this book of, “Acts of the Holy Spirit” (may be a better title for the book), he was reminded by God’s glorious Spirit, to state that the purpose of the coming of the Messiah to the world was to proclaim a new message. It was the good news of peace that Jesus proclaimed. Peace is shalom in the Old Testament and the word encompasses a whole list of components of peace in the holistic sense including salvation, abundant life, prosperity etc.) Jesus is the Lord of all. Being an embodiment of peace, He can supply peace instantly. Any seeker after the truth is guaranteed peace and

¹⁷² “I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God” (Daniel 7:26).

¹⁷³ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 145.

¹⁷⁴ “for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:4-5).

transformation by Jesus. The world is in dire need of peace like no other time in history. The church can bring this peace to people.

The Multicultural Church and the Paradigm of Reconciliation

The above discussion sheds light on the importance of the church to become multinational and multicultural. Principles of theology drawn from the Bible relate to the meaning, ministry and mission of the Incarnate Congregation to all people. From systemic and theological stand points, the church has to include the Diaspora people. This application is possible in a changing neighborhood. Shalom/ reconciliation is the theological principle of living in peace in the city, by bringing transformation with the message of the Kingdom of God in a practical way.

In countries like India, Guatemala and Kenya, giving a goat or a chicken to individual families can teach them to become independent in supporting the family and the schooling of their children. This is very similar to what I have been doing in India in giving fishing nets to the fishermen, instead of giving them fish, and educating the disadvantaged children until they graduate with nursing degrees. Continuous giving of money creates dependency which is counterproductive. Heifer International does practical ministries to help poor people in this remarkable way. While admiring this type of effective service, Jimmy Carter, the former US president made a statement, “With all the money donated to help fight famine around the world, with all the grandiose plans conceived to conquer poverty, all it takes to save a child is a goat,”¹⁷⁵

Teaching English as a second language and becoming friendly with the Diaspora people in the neighborhood, can be a simple starting point for a declining denominational

¹⁷⁵ Jo Luck, *Goats are the Gifts*, (Little Rock, AR: Heifer International, December 2006), 5-6.

church in America, especially in the transitional neighborhood. By doing so, the church can lead the Diaspora people to salvation and incorporate them gradually into the mainstream church life. The future of Mount Pleasant is reflected in the present educational system at Mount Pleasant. Cultural change is on the increase underlying the importance of the Spanish language. 35.4% of 1677 students enrolled at the Mount Pleasant Public School speak Spanish in comparison to the students at the Providence public schools where 41.6% speak Spanish out of 26,668 students. We have seen this data according to the year 2000 (Table 7).

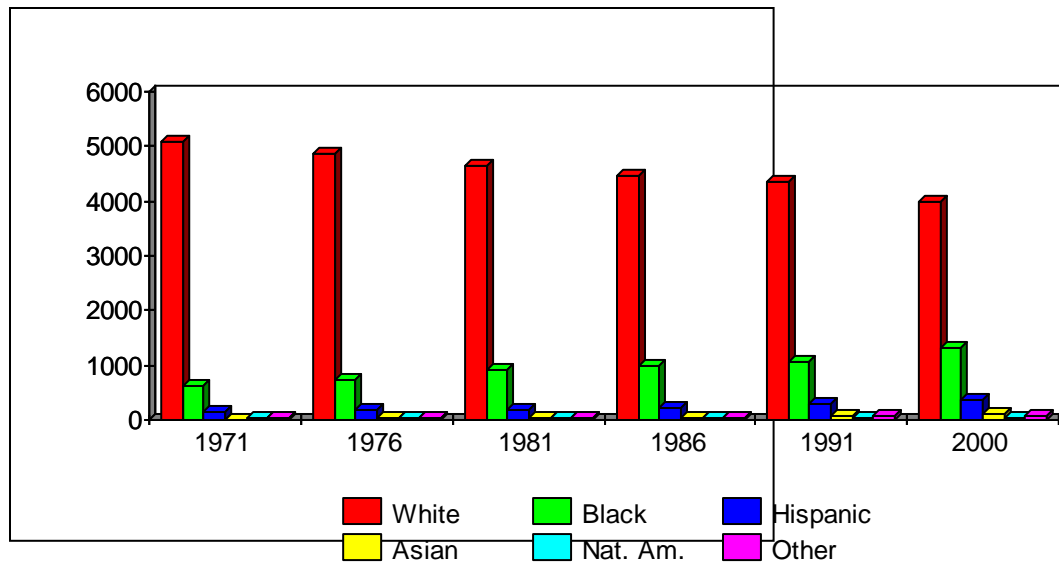
There are only 3 Spanish congregations, 1 Portuguese congregation and 1 Haitian congregation in Rhode Island out of 75 American Baptist churches. Two out of the three Spanish churches are sharing space with American Baptist churches.¹⁷⁶ Iglesia Bautista Hispana has an average attendance between 60 and 70. Pastor Orlando Izizary became a pastor at this church in 2004 when the congregation had a membership of 40 people. The church was started in 1974 with Pastor Ritardo as the pastor. Pastor Orlando is glad to have his Spanish congregation meet at the Calvary Baptist Church in Providence. Pastor Alejandro Gaete has a Spanish congregation (Iglesia Ezperanzo) sharing space with Church of the Master in Providence. This is a new church planting (2 years old) endeavor by Pastor Alejandro with a Spanish congregation of 50 people. Pastor Rodrigues started a new Spanish congregation (Primera Iglesia) in Woonsocket, RI in 2003 with 15 people and the church increased in number to 80 people. They had been sharing space at First Baptist Church, Woonsocket for 4 years. A few months ago the pastor came to know suddenly

¹⁷⁶ Information about ethnic and multicultural churches of American Baptist Churches of R I, was collected by the author based on several telephone interviews with 6 different pastors, January 16 and 17, 2007.

that they could not meet at this location any more. God opened another door to share space with United Methodist Church in the same city, although Primera Iglesia is still an American Baptist associated with ABCORI (American Baptist Churches of Rhode Island).

Haitian Baptist Church of Rhode Island has been an American Baptist Church with Rev. Hilarie as the pastor for a few years. The pastor mentioned about controlling elements in the church which led him out. His church, with hundred people, is an independent congregation and they meet in another building. Rev. Oliver Bala is the senior pastor of Mount Hope Community Baptist Church which shares space with a Portuguese congregation. Rev. Bala who is Portuguese, is the pastor of the English church at present. After ten years of ministering to both churches in English and Portuguese, he has hired a Portuguese pastor for the Portuguese church. Some of the Portuguese people who speak English attend the English services thus making Mount Hope Community Baptist Church a multi ethnic church. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is turning into a Multicultural Congregation. The rest of the ABCORI churches are wondering as to how to work with the Diaspora people, but encourage Diaspora missions. We hope to see many churches becoming multicultural in Rhode Island. At the national level, there is much interest in Diaspora ministry, but the numbers are not encouraging with regard to church planting or doing Diaspora missions. The following Table 9 illustrates the situation.

Table 9. Trend in Number of Churches by Ethnicity for ABC/USA with Projection for Year 2000



According to the above table by George Younger, there were 289 Hispanic Churches out of 5843 in 1991.¹⁷⁷ It was 4.9% as opposed to 2.5% in 1971 which is an increase of 2.4% in 20 years. The projection for 2000 was 375 churches out of 5880 (6.4%) George Younger points out in his article on, “‘Not by Might, nor by Power’: Urban Ministry in American Baptist Churches,” that the ABC as a denomination has, “failed to produce a national strategy for urban ministry or for dealing with metropolitan issues and problems.”

¹⁷⁸ The denomination leaves the individual churches to have their own strategy for urban ministry. The autonomous churches receive resources, training etc. from the denomination.

¹⁷⁷ Clifford Green, *Churches Cities and Human Community*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 48.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 50.

Younger states that the denomination's traditional focus for national strategy being transferred to local churches, "the denomination cannot be a rallying center,"¹⁷⁹ The major locus of action is with local congregations. Mount Pleasant Baptist Church is autonomous and urban ministry is our strategic vision.

The church of the living God has to swim against the current as opposed to swimming with the current while dealing with social justice. Esther had the moral courage to take the risk of swimming against the current in facing the king believing that justice would prevail. She acted proactively and prevented the catastrophe that could have fallen upon the Jews. Jesus answered all the questions relating to justice by dying on the cross as a just, for the unjust (Isaiah 53:5-12). The church has, therefore, the moral power to fight proactively for justice. Also, the church has to move beyond being a social and advocacy organization, to a productive entity thereby being seen as a creative force. The church can continue to learn to deal with the transformational and realistic aspects of the gospel from a theological perspective, especially in the context of the economic and cultural complexities of disadvantaged and down-trodden people. The essence of the incarnate congregation is its relevance and implications of practicing Christianity in the urban context.

Biblically based transformation of people affirms the vitality of Christianity for the purpose of the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The Incarnate Church is an answer to three-fold questions of A) How are we going to deal with poor neighborhoods? B) How does the description of Christ incarnate, crucified and risen fit into the incarnate congregation to live the gospel of reconciliation amidst the poor in the city? C) And how do we encounter the inner city with God's reconciliation? Linthicum asks two vital

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 51.

questions relating to the practice and proclamation of the church in the city; “How do God’s people work for the good of their city? What activities constitute the appropriate ministries in which the church should be involved in the city?”¹⁸⁰ While addressing similar questions like, what causes poverty? and why are there poor people in the city?, Conn and Ortiz refer to oppression and injustice with a warning, “We cannot close our eyes to the fact that injustice and oppression are the root of most poverty in the world.”¹⁸¹ By living the life of the Reigning Christ, by resisting the evil in the city systems and by pointing to the Incarnate Christ, the church can bring deliverance from oppression and injustice.

Jesus used the metaphor of light while describing Himself, “I am the Light of the world” (John 8:12). Jesus is not like the light (simile) but the light (metaphor). Jesus spoke the world into existence. Light has creative power and majesty of God (Gen.1:3-4), salvation and new beginnings (John 1: 9, 1 John1:10) and, justice and liberation (Isaiah. 9:2; 58:8). People who sit in darkness have to see the light to get illuminated. The political, social, theological, economic, ecological, and health dilemmas of cities around the world share a common denominator and they should not be neglected in an interconnected world. The social location of the Incarnate Congregation can be among the poor in the city and can do the right thing for them at any time. The Apostle Paul did not select villages or towns, but chose cities to evangelize and to plant churches. According to Linthicum, “the cities in which Paul invested considerable time and built strong churches

¹⁸⁰ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 163.

¹⁸¹ Harvey Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 328.

were all the politically, economically, and religiously paramount cities of their Roman regions. Paul was an urban pastor and church planter.”¹⁸² The church should do the same.

The Incarnate Church should be a Good Samaritan Community Church, connected to the community in the first place and the church must locate the future of the inner city in a theology of reconciliation (Rev. 21:1-22:5; Col.1:20; Eph.1:9-10; 2Cor.5:17-21). The Apostle Paul uses the language of reconciliation in the eschatological reign of Christ through His death, resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. He uses the word of reconciliation very powerfully in the New Testament. I would like to call his approach to shalom, “**Paul’s Paradigm of Reconciliation.**” The city, the community ministry and the Incarnate Church are envisioned in the larger systemic, redemptive and historical framework of creation, fall, redemption and new creation. God wants to reach the world through every city in the globe. The church has to celebrate the city and that celebration, according to Linthicum, “begins with the discovery that the city is the act of God’s creation just as much as in all of nature. We need to celebrate because God deeply loves the city, both because he created it and because it is his abode.”¹⁸³ The city of God is the center of the new creation and reconciliation. Christ reconciled the world to God.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, the church should concentrate on reaching the entire globe and should not write off the excluded countries, cities or neighbor hoods, just like the businesses do.

The Incarnate Church of reconciliation should be looked at from the view point of the celebration (banquet) of the Kingdom of God which Christ refers to in Luke14:16-23 with

¹⁸² Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 184.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 29.

¹⁸⁴ “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not imputing their trespasses to them” (II Corinthians 5:19).

the message that the banquet is not for the privileged or a particular community. The banquet is for everybody. Coming back to the story of the Chinese gentleman who had been sitting next to me in the Greyhound bus, I asked myself a question as to whether or not the Chinese people would be excluded in the banquet of Christ. I was puzzled, but kept praying for him for about 45 minutes. I asked him a question as to how he was doing, which opened up an opportunity to witness for Christ. The conversation became very illuminating and he gave his heart to Christ before the bus reached Grand Central Station in New York City. Praise the Lord!

The Incarnate Church should be a Shalom Community of sharing, witnessing and welcoming, and established under the banner of reconciliation and love. It all starts with the love of God. The Incarnate Church of reconciliation is centered on the foundational principle and truth of the cross of Calvary, where Jesus died for every one in the world. Grace is the offshoot of the cross, the unexpected gift of the redeemed from sin that creates the church with all of its brokenness, sinfulness, weakness, pain and frailty (Eph.2:8-9). Divine grace does not mean that it is for moral or good people. Volf asserts, "Relationship is not grounded in moral performance."¹⁸⁵ Forgiveness of God applies to all those lives which have been crushed and hurt. Grace does not and should not overlook suffering, but it is the promise of Jesus in the midst of it.

The Incarnate Church is not legalistic and moralistic but is a center of grace and reconciliation. This is the greatest challenge for the church. The central question in the book of the Galatians is an encounter with Jesus and not compliance with religious standards for united fellowship of the Jews and the Gentiles. It is the same for the church

¹⁸⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 164.

and the world. Religious standards should be in conformity to the leading of the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:18). The church should not appropriate a kind of structurally formulated gospel bondage (4:3-11). The Apostle Paul denounces divisions in Antioch as everywhere else (2:11-14). One set of standards should not be used to exclude others (6:12-13).

The theological question in Galatians is not about individual salvation but about community boundaries. Individual reconciliation with God is great but it is incomplete without Community-reconciliation to God. Linthicum observes, “Although receiving Christ as Savior is necessary to enable community to occur, conversion does not result in reconciliation with God. True reconciliation is not completed until one is reconciled with his or her neighbor and has begun to live in community with him or her. Community is a necessary precondition of being fully reconciled to God.”¹⁸⁶ The grace of God is not well understood or people have a different perception of it. The church and God are perceived differently; Christian living and even salvation is juxtaposed with certain type of life style, which may be the reason why people think of coming to church as soon as they get their lives together.

The Incarnate Congregation should bring shalom to the inner cities by bringing its presence, prayer, peace and power into the midst of one city after the other. Linthicum points out, “Our Lord was not crucified in a gothic cathedral placed upon a marble altar between two silver candlesticks. He was crucified on a rugged cross between two thieves, on the city’s garbage heap, at the kind of place where cynics talk smut and thieves curse and soldiers gamble. This is where Christ died. And that is what Christ died about. And that is where Christ calls His church to be. And that is what Christ calls His church to be

¹⁸⁶ Robert Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 260.

about.”¹⁸⁷ The dynamics of community rebuilding is authenticated with excellent application of the Nehemiah principles as outlined in the prophetic book with references to risk taking, community organization, overcoming obstacles intelligently, new commitment to the community, stewardship, empowerment and all other management principles, but all under the direction of the Spirit of God. Adaptation of the Nehemiah type of rebuilding dynamics in the context of the Incarnate Congregation is the nucleus in the community to bring about transformation in any city.

The Incarnate Congregation can have the peace of God to the fullest.¹⁸⁸ The peace that Jesus gives is real and uplifting. We have the peace of God and can give the good news of reconciliation. This is the only thing which counts in the end. All that Moses was expected to do was to refer the suffering people to the raised pole for the deliverance of the Israelites. The message was very simple that Moses had to deliver in admonishing the people to take a look at the brazen pole for healing. Whoever believed and did according to the word of God was healed. The Christian church has to use the same imagery in pointing the people of the world to look at the cross to be saved, healed and delivered.

The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of the knowledge of Christ and the atonement.¹⁸⁹ It is very important to note that, “Paul’s Paradigm of Reconciliation,” has two dimensions. The paradigm of reconciliation is the message of the cross and that of the crucified messenger (Savior) on the one side, and on the other, is the crucified church with the message of reconciliation (Incarnate Church). God has given the Incarnate Church,

¹⁸⁷ Ibid,127.

¹⁸⁸ “In Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John: 16:33).

¹⁸⁹ “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (ICorinthians2:2).

“the ministry of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:18). Paul asserts that God’s people are ambassadors.¹⁹⁰ We have no choice but to be crucified with Christ and get people reconciled to God. Volf asserts, “The cross says that despite its manifest enmity toward God humanity belongs to God; God will not be God without humanity.”¹⁹¹ Paul understood the meaning of crucifixion in terms of discipleship.¹⁹² Paul was crucified with Christ and lived the life of Christ (Galatians 2:20).

To be crucified with Christ is to share the motives, the purposes and the way of life that made the Master go to the cross, carrying the sins of humanity, forgiving, loving, serving all people and, creating harmony by reconciling people to God and one another. In a nutshell the Incarnate Church can walk with God, following the footsteps of the Christ of Calvary and initiating harmonious reconciliation between Christ and the rest of the world. We have been embraced by God to make space for others in ourselves including our enemies. Volf observes that the reenactment of the Eucharist reminds us, “In receiving Christ’s body and spilled blood, we, in a sense, receive all those whom Christ received by suffering.”¹⁹³ The Incarnate Congregation is expected to point out unsaved people to the Savior of the cross for reconciliation and solution to all their problems.

Going back to my first encounter with the cobbler and the loss of his only son, I was reminded of the imagery of God losing His only begotten Son for the reconciliation of the world. Twenty years later, I saw him again and gave the message of reconciliation and pointed him to the cross. He received Christ as Lord and Savior at the corner of a street

¹⁹⁰ “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf be reconciled to God” (II Corinthians 5: 20).

¹⁹¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1996), 126.

¹⁹² “Except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Galatians 6: 14).

¹⁹³ Ibid, 129.

and was reconciled to God. We can plead with people to get reconciled to God, and like Paul, we should be bold to state, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation: to every one who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY OF APPROACH TO DETERMINE RECONCILIATORY PRACTICES THROUGH SYSTEMS LEARNING

Framework of Project and Methodology

Introduction and chapter one of this thesis has been devoted to discover the social analysis of the issue and, to visualize the big picture from a contextual and comprehensive perspective. This has been done to clarify, and to systemically answer the first question, “what is going on?” (Clarification) according to Dr. Villafañe’s lecture on “hermeneutical circle” in Social Ethics¹⁹⁴ We have attempted, as a second step in the process, to find out systemically, “what does the Bible and pertinent disciplines say” (Conceptualization) relating to practicing systemic theology. Biblical and theological reflections include, not only, researching systems, but also, researching relevant sources (Chapters 2-4). The third and final step (Confrontation) of the hermeneutical circle of social ethics is answering the question, “How are we going to respond?” While confronting the issue systemically, we encounter development of strategic policies, procedures and methods from a systemic view of reality. This last step (Confrontation) is triggered by the first two steps (Clarification and Conceptualization) to arrive at strategic findings and solutions (Chapter 5).

We have explored the systems/theological/literature reflection in this project to understand the declining denominational church in a transitional neighborhood, and to find out how to turn it around systemically. “Hexagon process” and the “learning teams” are

¹⁹⁴ Eldin Villafañe, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Class Lecture (Boston, MA), *The “Hermeneutic Circle” in Social Ethics*, 06 June, 2006.

two other additional methods of systems thinking, which need to be included to gain a wider perspective.

Hexagon process is a brainstorming method used in systems thinking. Learning teams use this activity efficiently to comprehend multifarious ideas relating to the complexity of social reality. While systemically analyzing social reality, the learning teams see, not only, the emergence of the complete and large picture of social reality, but see simultaneously the growing strength of the learning team as well. Team Learning emphasizes coordinated action based on collective intelligence. Teams can embrace dialogue by brainstorming and suspending assumptions. This “thinking together” is just like the Greeks practiced. According to Senge, “dia-logos meant a free-flowing of meaning through a group” for the primary purpose of discovering insights, which are not attainable on an individual basis.¹⁹⁵ Fact finding is the underlining principle for using collective intelligence. Assumptions are deliberately suspended while collective intelligence is willingly accepted. Team takes the responsibility if certain decisions go wrong and individuals are not affected. It gives the individuals the freedom to speak out fearlessly, and collective intelligence leads to an intelligent decision. This decision making process can be time consuming because the selected hypothesis for the solution of the problem, can be dropped off at the last minute and selection of the next best available option, is made as a test case scenario.

Emotions can soar high at the initial stage but a thought provoking and quality conscious team can weed out issues if they arise inadvertently. While trying to select our first learning team at the Trinity Evangelical Covenant Church more than fifty people were

¹⁹⁵ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 10.

selected for lunch for this team learning to collectively explore what really turned the church around when Rev. Norman Swensen became the pastor of the church 37 years ago. Everyone was excited and competed with one another to speak out and share. It became unmanageable. It was an unintended consequence. We had to shift gears right away to regain our original basis of collective intelligence and a decision was made to have the first seven people who had been there for 30 plus years to share their views followed by those who had been there for 20 plus years but below thirty. By using this descending scale, we interviewed every one of the 50 plus people who were there to analyze the turning point for the church. It was a process of learning for the team and it had been a continuous learning in two other churches where the case studies were conducted.

Principles learned from the learning teams (Case Studies) at the Trinity Covenant Church

The learning teams' sessions held at the Trinity Covenant Church, Manchester, CT., were our first sessions in the learning process. Rev. Swensen had served twelve years ago as pastor of this church. He had completed 25 years of service in that church before his retirement as a full time pastor. I was privileged to have lunch and an interview session with very important people of this church. Most of them were with Swensen for more than 20 years and had seen first hand what the Lord had done. Some people whom he personally brought to Christ are in various ministries at the regional or national level. Swensen led two brothers and their parents to Jesus. One of the brothers is Mr. L who led Mr. B.D. to Christ. Mr. L works with the Moslems through a well known ministry called the Navigators stationed in Michigan. Mr. B.D. is the president and founder of Irons

Sharpens Iron (men's ministry) which is a division of a larger ministry called Vision New England.

After hearing more than 50 people dialogue at the luncheon session at the Trinity Covenant Church, the present pastor was surprised to learn that every one in the church had been working with the Lord in one type of ministry or the other. He made a hospital visit and was amazed to see that the patient had been already visited by deacons and several other members before his arrival at the hospital. Speaking in admiration of the vision of Swensen, he thanked him from his heart, for making his vocation at the church very pleasant. Rev. Swensen shared, during my private interviews with him several times, about how he was introduced to the Holy Spirit by his brother in law. Based on my analysis, his ministry was the work of the Holy Spirit. The following will explain how the method and the message of Swensen brought about the miracle transformation of a declining congregation through the Holy Spirit.

The first few years Swensen was attending meeting after meeting without leading one soul to Christ. It was a miserable experience for him as a pastor. He and his wife went on a vacation for the summer for a couple of weeks but never wanted to go back. A few years went by when the Lord gave him the courage to stand up against the controlling elements in the church and that became a turning point for the church.

Some people were hesitant to point out the hindrances in the church since those who had caused them were present in the audience which numbered around 50 people.¹⁹⁶ Later privately, I was enlightened about the sensitive issues which were contributed by some

¹⁹⁶ Details of issues and hindrances caused by people are very similar in all three churches (learning teams). This is the limitation of these case studies. Specifics cannot be given but implied using terms like angry individuals or controlling personalities

people in the audience. Once when the positive side of the change in the church became the focal point of the discussion, there was electricity in the room. The larger picture of Swensens's ministry began to emerge. It was not a linear ministry going in one direction from one resource to a need but an inter-relational ministry. Dr. Doug and Judy Hall point out, "If we are not receiving from those we seek to serve we are not working at the highest levels of our calling."¹⁹⁷ After twenty five years of ministry in the same church, it was a discovery not only for Swensen but to all the participants that the phenomenal growth of the church was attributable to inter-relational ministry of both the minister and the congregation to one another. Both the pastor and the congregation had been doing ministry naturally, which they discovered to their amazement. It became their life style and they did not think of it as a process or a program. The four learning teams of people we studied began to grow stronger in the Lord and serving both people within and outside the church. Learning teams become more enlightened as they continue to learn more. At the end, questionnaire was given to each person to fill out to evaluate the turning points of the church

Swensen discovered principles one after the other like the Apostle Paul did in his ministry with the guidance of the Spirit of God. One of the best principles which I have learned from him is, "the hour glass principle" The top section of the hour glass represents the people while the bottom section represents the world ministered to by the connecting thin structure which is represented by the minister. Swensen taught them while learning from them simultaneously. Most ministers preach to the congregation (in-reach-focused without outreach) and then retire or leave. Swensen ministered there inter-relationally with

¹⁹⁷Douglas and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft; not yet published), 27.

a different twist. Primarily the ministry was from the preacher to the congregation. As time went by, the congregation ministered to him. Also, he took the church with him to minister to the outside world by training the people to do exactly what he had done. The church people are still ministering even though he had left them twelve years ago. This is the hallmark of his success which I have experienced in this learning team approach to be adopted at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church.

Intense interviews with groups of seven were very effective in scrutinizing the success of Rev. Swensen's methods and principles not only at this Trinity Evangelical Covenant Church but at the First Congregational Church of Hebron, as well. Also, he taught them a unique principle of giving for mission or vision related projects which were financed exclusively from the discretionary funds that people gave, and not from the tithe which the faithful members had already committed to the church. By tapping into the discretionary funds of people and, financing the visions and dreams of the church, he revolutionized, "the love offering principle."¹⁹⁸

Based on the interviews with Swensen and the learning teams at the Trinity Covenant Church, the following observations were made. His ministry was an attraction to visitors. The church foyer is the place to create the first and the best impression to attract the first time visitors. The foyer is a place to welcome with joy, smiles, excitement and welcome that captures any new visitor. At the time of our visit to Trinity Covenant Church, my wife and I were waiting in the foyer; a lady (Mrs. J) spotted us, walked toward us, introduced herself and welcomed us. In answering an interview question of her coming to this church for 28 years, she pointed to the excitement, smiles and hugs at the

¹⁹⁸ Rev. Swensen, explained in details to the author at the luncheon interviews July 23 and 30, 2006.

foyer and the welcome she had received when she came there for the first time 28 years ago. She did not find it in her previous church which she had attended for many years. People used to run out the door immediately after service but not any more. Swensen became aware that groups of people were speaking in close knit conversations ignoring others by shrugging shoulders and not allowing them into the conversation. An idea struck him about this, “shoulder turning principle.” Swensen spoke from the pulpit to the congregation in a humorous way to introduce one another at the fellowship time, by saying, “Nice to meet you; my name is Norman Swensen.” They all got the point and, the church was never the same again in welcoming visitors and everyone.

Mrs. Gloria Swensen told us that she discovered, by talking to some people, that they went out quickly for a cup of coffee after the Sunday service. The very next Sunday coffee with Swedish pastries (30 years ago the congregation was mostly Swedish), was introduced to help the people stay longer and discuss the sermon while drinking coffee. Perceived needs are great if understood with proper communication. Dr. Doug and Judy Hall point out, “Proper communication is, of course, crucial to even understanding peoples’ perceived needs and it is very important, after hearing them to choose to meet one that is possible to meet and to meet it thoroughly.”¹⁹⁹ The procedure followed ultimately meeting the vital need of salvation. There was a lady (Ms. J), with a year and a half old baby, who was appointed to visit a mother with a new born baby and to give her a rose. Information about baby rearing was sent regularly; eventually she came to church and has been working in the nursery ever since.

¹⁹⁹ Douglas and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft; not yet published), 43.

Swensen had a follow up plan for the visitors. The visitors received a call from the pastor within two days after their first visit. He would offer to visit them for clarification of the sermon and fellowship. He did it in such a gentle way and with a twist by asking them about whether or not the coffee pot was working. He led many visitors to Christ using this method. He would take two other people with him to train them at the same time. The reason for going in a team of three was that they would not be mistaken for Jehovah Witnesses. The lady who was our first point of contact told us that she gave her heart to Christ at the dining table 28 years ago (Mrs. J). She filled a commitment card of her decision that evening, and she still carries the card in her purse as a remembrance.

Swensen provided necessary training. Over the years, all those whom Swensen had trained, trained others. This inter-relational ministry approach and training resulted in multiplication of numbers. Dr. Douglas Hall and Judy Hall attest, “This is fundamental to an indigenous form of ministry, a ministry that is self-generating that supports itself. The people who are helped go in full circles and help others. The effects in the end are multiple.”²⁰⁰ They did it with such love and grace that they did not know that they were following a principle.

Swensen went to Florida to take the Evangelism Explosion program offered by Dr. D. James Kennedy, Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Fort Lauderdale, FL.²⁰¹ He became a certified trainer to train others in the church. Also, Swensen revealed himself as a coach, playing with the players in the field and not sitting on the bench in the waiting area. Being trained in the army, he focused on leaving an army behind him prior to his

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 27.

²⁰¹ D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1977).

departure. He did it because of his calling and not for practical reasons. “In the end we do it because it seems to us to be the highest form of ministry. It is very fulfilling.”²⁰²

Swensen taught from the Bible. He accepted the old Swedish approach to accepting new ideas or programs only if they were founded on the Bible. He conducted home Bible Study groups with a different flavor. He dazzled people with the Word without deceiving them. On one occasion the topic was on evolution. An atheist who did not believe in God came to this study and shared his views. The discussion was fruitful when the biblical model of God’s plan was presented with a challenge to be a part of God’s plan for the entire cosmos including the human race. Mr. G.K. shared with enthusiasm about his conversion and he became a deacon of the church for many years. He used resources from Christian Research Institute to teach the reality of the Bible from theological and scientific perspectives.

Church music is essential to the worship environment. Music was adjusted to appeal to the taste of the contemporary worshippers. It was either different music or tune but the same old hymn which made a big difference to make the church look 10 years younger. Appointment to positions in the church was very critical. The music director who was hired was not saved. As soon as Swensen heard about it, he made sure that he could present the Gospel to the new music director and the latter was saved. The music director (Mr. S) is a powerful man of God who has been instrumental, just like his gifted music, in bringing people to Christ. His Christmas Cantata is attended by 1300 people in each of the 5 shows held for the public during Christmas season. My wife and I conducted interviews of people who had come to know Christ through the cantata and other aspects of the

²⁰² Dr. Douglas and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft; not yet published), 27.

ministry of the church. We went to see the cantata one evening. 120 people representing 30 different churches through the cantata, have been a monumental testimony for bringing people to Christ for the past 22 years. It has been the result of one music director coming to Christ. Once a custodian of a school where the cantata was being held, challenged the vice president of the school to sing in the cantata. He sang with conviction and, confessed his sin before the audience and got saved right on the stage by opening his heart to Christ.

Rev. Swensen did everything for 25 years at Trinity Covenant Church based on the principles of love and grace with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A few churches in Manchester, CT have maintained their church membership numerically with an average of 70 or less. God used Swensen to turn the declining church to a very productive church and today, the church has a membership of 500 to 600 people with more than 50 ministries. They keep growing like a movement affecting the neighboring communities. The Halls point out, “A movement that is multiplying has the potential to affect entire communities. When vital, relationally oriented systems grow, they move out in concentric rings like ripples that emanate from the place where a stone enters a quiet pool.”²⁰³

Principles learned from the learning teams (Case Studies) at the First Congregational Church of Hebron

Rev. Swensen served for a couple of years at this beautiful church as an interim minister. The present pastor of the First Congregational Church of Hebron is eternally thankful to Swensen for being a model of excellence for all pastors. The following will illustrate how he did it. The church was very different prior to his coming to this church. Pastors rarely stayed very long at this church. A controlling group of people once

²⁰³ Ibid, 53.

corrected a pastor about his style of giving altar call. They formed a quick council meeting and, without being voted upon, told the pastor not to set his feet again in the church. One of the deacons (Mr. D), got saved and reasoned with the church about the pastors not staying longer in the church. During this wild council meeting, he was instrumental in making them realize that they were the real problem in the church and not necessarily the pastors. Rev. Swensen came on board in this context of turmoil in the church. He taught them about the shoulder shrugging principle humorously and soon they began to learn all the needed principles, one by one, like the Trinity Covenant Church congregation did.

There was an unusual problem during the service. Toddlers were running around and nothing could be done about it. Swensen introduced a lady (Mrs. J) to the Holy Spirit as a friend. She recollected and shared that she, “did not like the Holy Spirit.” It was because the Holy Spirit started nudging her to work with the kids with His still small voice. (Mrs. J) confessed that she had to eventually give in to become the recreation director for the kids’ ministry known as AWANA. This ministry has been very vital for the turning point for the church along with several different programs. Swensen would write on the clip board and ask people whether they could do a particular ministry. He would then encourage people to do it. Every time Swensen introduced a new principle, he watched God’s leading until the principle had a life of its own. Once when people experienced it in due time, it would be an opening for another principle to be introduced. Sometimes, Swensen would come with a bunch of papers with different types of ministries written on them and would give everyone, one paper for something to do, using their creativity. Sometimes obstacles mounted up and his new idea would be shot down. He would tunnel

like in the foot ball game and let the flag down until another favorable opportunity opened itself up to put the flag up.

Swensen would speak at the story hour when there was only one child but soon it grew to 12 children. Changes began to happen and the Spirit of God brought transformation in people. Soon these transformed people outlived those who had resisted for a long time. One lovely lady confessed that she did not like the adaptation of contemporary music at the expense of the old hymns. She told us that she had no choice but to learn to go along with the majority of the younger population in singing along the new contemporary songs. Every one heard her say that she liked the new music but preferred the old hymns. Those who were transformed by the blood of Jesus became bonded like a valentine group in a safe environment.

Swensen had a personal touch with every one in the congregation. Also, he used real situations in his sermons to relate the Gospel to real events. The Holy Spirit prompted a person who was using his lawnmower 3 times, not to move it any further but he did not listen. The lawn mower fell right into a ditch and it took a very long time to get it out. Swensen preached on the parable of the lawnmower. It was powerful. The ministry of the Holy Spirit began to have a spiraling effect in influencing different sectors of the region and beyond.

Two learning teams consisting of seven people in each team were able to give in depth analysis of how their witnessing and living a Christian life had been the direct influence of the ministry of Swensen. More than 18 people participated in the general analysis and participated in the discussion. They completed the questionnaire. The church could have declined at the time of the arrival of Swensen but it turned around completely.

Several lessons were learned in both these churches through the learning teams. Principle of prayer, principle of planting seeds, principle of patience, principle of peace, principle of passion, principle of perseverance, principle of positive outlook, principle of persuasion and the principle of personal touch were learned in these two churches. One of the landmark lessons learned in both these churches has been the emphasis which Swensen had in each of these two churches. He made it easier for the next pastor to continue what had been already established. It was a long range vision with which he had operated in these two churches.

Swensen learned how to deal with the people of New England. His home church back in Illinois was large with 900 people in the congregation. The corporate culture of the congregation was to unite together under the leadership of the pastor as the shepherd of the flock. It was a shock when he arrived the first time in New England to work in a secondary culture as opposed to what he was used to in an environment of farm life very similar to primary culture. Primary culture is where people have family, personal knowledge and relational networks with all their needs being met informally through their cultural ties and oral communication. Secondary culture is where needs are met not through personal or network of family ties, but through formal means of communication and contractual agreements.

According to Dr. Doug and Judy Hall, the presence of a spiritual element to its overall way of life can be missing in the secondary culture. They point out, "Primary cultures tend toward a spiritual orientation to life. Secondary cultures often tend toward a secular orientation. Once someone is ingrained in secular logic, it is difficult for him to see the

relevance of religious activities.”²⁰⁴ It was a difficult culture to deal with and Swensen had to learn to make many adjustments. Soon he was able to distinguish the two different cultures with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. It was a very similar situation illustrated by Dr. Douglas Hall’s, “Parable of the toaster and the cat”, where two different logical approaches are needed to deal with them.²⁰⁵ Operational procedure to repair a toaster (non-living system) is entirely different from that of fixing a problem in a cat because the cat is a living system. Coming from a farming background Swensen analyses the two different logical approaches to be used in New England; Scottish sheep and Spanish sheep approaches. Spanish sheep follow the shepherd like a flock where as the Scottish sheep are scattered with independent tendencies to follow the shepherd. Swensen has mentioned many times in private conversations adding humorously that there is nothing wrong in the way they are but different styles are needed to lead them.²⁰⁶

Principles learned from the learning teams (Case Studies) at the First Congregational Church of Revere

Rev. Nick Granitsas is the pastor of the First Congregational Church of Revere, MA. Dealing with a secondary culture and a transitional neighborhood has been a challenge in the past but not any more. It was a very delightful dialogue and learning for the learning team at this church. Pastor Granitsas has a unique principle which he uses in all aspects of the church ministries is called, “core principle.” Every ministry has a core group of 4-7 people who are committed to that particular ministry. They own the vision of the ministry

²⁰⁴ Dr. Douglas and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope*, (Rough Draft; not yet published), 27.

²⁰⁵ Dr. Douglas Hall, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Class Lecture (Boston, MA), *Systems Thinking and the Urban Church*, 22 September, 2003.

²⁰⁶ Rev. Norman Swensen, Founder/Director of Time –Line Ministries, (Ashford, CT), conversation with author, January 2007.

and, they are always there for discipleship and mentoring others who join them to be involved in that distinct ministry. The pastor's daughter (Miss. C.) explained to the learning team about how 7 core young people took charge of the youth program which turned around the ministry and took it off the ground. Initially, it was nothing but a social club (coffee house) until her sister and brother in law took charge of the leadership to conduct bible studies and discussion groups etc. which became a turning point for the youth group.

The following are the 6 core principles of the First Congregational Church in Revere.

Pro-life principle: 16 people from this group went for the March for Life held in Washington, DC a few years ago. Four people are in the core group of this ministry to save life. It has been a need based ministry. There was a need for building a crisis pregnancy center at Revere. While reading in the newsletter published by the Women's Concern (a well known national ministry to save life) about the possibility of opening a center at Revere, this ministry took it as God's will to go for it. This core group of 4 people inspired every one in the congregation. They mobilized volunteers, handy men and all other needed resources from the entire church and built the first Crisis Pregnancy Help Center as part of the Women's Concern. Within a few years, they have saved over 70 babies. The Pastors wife (Mrs. JN) works in the local hospital as a nurse practitioner. While attending to the medical need of the baby of a teenage mother, she had the privilege to refer her to this center.

Prayer-breakfast principle: A very dedicated couple (Mr. J and Mrs. C) run this powerful ministry for the men in the church. Delicious breakfast cooked by (Mrs. C) and a few women drew many men from the church for food, fellowship and bonding. This

ministry has an average attendance of 100 people with a guest speaker chosen from the church every month. They pray for one another and the church. My wife and I were very impressed with this ministry that we promised to be there in June. It is meant only for men but my wife will be in the kitchen as part of the cooking crew.

Feeding principle: This ministry feeds an average of 70 families per week. At one point they fed 196 families. A dollar-donation is encouraged. (Mr. B) who has a master's degree in the urban ministry, ministers to these families. He has been with the church for more than 20 years. This ministry is owned by the lay people who have full time jobs but volunteer 10 to 15 hours a week and mobilize the entire church to serve the families.

Independent refugee settlement principle: The church took a calculated risk in sponsoring the refugees when they heard about it on the radio. The Cambodian War left 18 widows with children as refugees in the refugee camp where they were led to Christ by Christians who were refugees themselves. The pastor received one widow with 3 children unexpectedly. It was a difficult adjustment. The American food made the Cambodian mother and children sick. The pastor's family had to sacrifice by eating Cambodian food only, to accommodate this food crisis. The church backed this ministry. Soon 7 families from the church sponsored 7 Cambodian/ Vietnamese families. Soon a Cambodian church was established with 40 people attending the first service. The church sponsored 50 families until they could become independent. The Cambodian church has had different pastors over the years and this Cambodian church is instrumental in making missionary trips to Cambodia and doing successful church planting in various parts of Cambodia. The Cambodian church in Revere still meets in the First Congregational Church building and Pastor Granitsas has agreed to let the Cambodian Church become affiliated to the Christian

Missionary Alliance as part of God's kingdom. Pastor Granitsas does not believe in denominational control. One of the Vietnamese is on the board of the First Congregational Church.

Missionary principle: The church has a terrific vision on missions. Every year, an average of 3 young people has been sent on short term missions to 30 different countries. Around 75 people have been sent in the past 25 years. It is remarkable that they have never missed one year in going abroad on short term missionary work. It revolutionized them and they shared their experiences in a church sponsored dinner. The church raised financial help for those who could not afford to pay for the trip. Family, friends and all others including the teachers of the students were contacted for donations. Students and parents went to local offices to collect all the soda cans and redeemed them. All the collected funds went specifically to this need and nothing else.

Adjustment principle: Pastor Granitsas never told people to give up their culture but led them into a serious bible study during the coffee hour. A Jewish lady (Mrs. J) told the learning team that she joined the choir of the First Congregational Church of Revere while attending another church. The Spirit of God ultimately gave her the freedom after convincing her to give up idolatrous practices. Mrs. J worked in the day care program where there were Moslem kids who would not eat pork. It was surprising that the Moslem children wanted to be the pig in the Christmas play.

Several important models/ principles have been learned through the case studies conducted in all these three churches. Visitor focus model, outreach focus model, baby focus model, prayer focus model, training focus model, preaching model, leadership model, mission giving model, and principles of prayer, passion, mission, peace,

perseverance, positive outlook, persuasion and personal touch have been learned. Also, mission sending model, prayer group model, pro-life-focused model, prayer breakfast model, family-feeding (food pantry) model, refugee settlement model and day care center model have been learned.

Dealing with the secularized culture in New England is a big challenge to preachers. Methodologies of approach have to be formulated led by the Spirit of God. Relationships are less important in secondary culture than material possessions. Possessions are not evil in themselves but possessions should not possess people. Materialism is a shock to people coming from poor countries and living in the urban areas of America. These immigrants and foreign born people who were raised in an environment of primary culture are here with values and relational dynamics that could benefit declining church if only the church people could win them for Christ. By working with these people in the transitional neighborhood, the church could experience a turn around for the glory of God.

Statistical analyses conducted in these three churches as case studies will be presented in the next chapter. These findings are important part of the case studies which can point out how the church can use them in the declining church. Where to start and how to begin the process will be analyzed based on the findings. We have analyzed the churches and learned from different approaches. Now, we need to examine how the hexagon tool can be used to practically assess the need for the declining Mount Pleasant Baptist Church.

The hexagon process at the preliminary session, is very exciting to the participants because every one gets involved in answering an important question, which is of interest and benefit to the entire group. Their responses are immediately recorded on the sequentially-numbered hexagons, and are placed randomly on a large board. Problematic

responses or sensitive responses could be verbalized better, though not on the hexagon paper. Private conversation could bring out the real meaning which in turn could be recorded suitably. The size of the participating audience could be anywhere from seven to seventy; however, the ideal size can range from ten to twenty. When there are enough responses, ranging from thirty to seventy, they can be categorized into applicable groups. Each category is titled based on the original relevant question which prompted the responses. The brevity of the title is imperative indicating at least part of the answer.

A second session, consisting of a core group of preferably a small number of participants ranging from seven to ten could gather for the purpose of deepening the understanding of the interrelationships of the categories. Categories, as they interrelate, can be diagrammed and connected in the form of causal loops. The major objective of the causal loop is to demonstrate how one category becomes an entry point, and how that one category influences the next one, which in turn influences the next one in the order. The operational sequence in the entire system is thus understood clearly.

Hexagon application at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church

November 1, 2004 was the first day of my appointment as pastor of this church. 23 people gathered for the first time at this learning session to explore the possibilities of turning around the declining church to become the most productive church in this transitional neighborhood. The excitement of the people was electrifying with looks of hope for the total transformation. A safe environment was established so that every participant could express his or her views of what needs to be done. When the fact was understood that this would continue to be a learning team and that every opinion could be expressed in this exploration of learning, views began to emerge and explode.

A question was formulated to narrow down the brainstorming aspect of the problem- How to revitalize the declining denominational church and turn it around toward a dynamic multicultural church by accepting the challenge (A) to explore the church vision, (B) to identify, appoint and empower leaders, (C) to establish a discipleship team of continuous learning, and to research what is actually working in this transitional neighborhood to reach the lost for the Kingdom of God. 3 hexagons were given to all the 23 participants to express three things that they would consider important to them that they see could transform the church for the extension of God's kingdom. It was phenomenal. All the hexagons were arranged on the wall, then were grouped together and were finally placed under different titles.

On November 6, 2004 which was a Saturday morning the second session brought 7 people and some of them in their late eighties (have been members for more than 50 years) who missed the first session for different valid reasons. After a brief but complete explanation for a systemic change for a fundamental solution to the synthetic design in a secondary culture they wrote down, on the three hexagons about their views for the turn around ideas of the kingdom of God. The third and final session was chosen to be held after a couple of days following the installation of the new pastor on Sunday November 7, 2004. Seven to ten people from these 3 sessions are going to work with me as the learning team for the revitalization of the church.

November 7 was the day of repentance and renewal for the church. More children and adults came to church and some of them were there for the first time. When the altar call was given many gave their hearts to Jesus and some recommitted their lives to serve Him. Some of them, whom I had witnessed to at the local Dunkin Donut coffee shop, were really

excited and were convicted leading to their giving their lives to Jesus in tears. The third session on November 9 Tuesday brought 13 people. This was more dynamic than ever before and, the question of how to turn around a declining denominational church in a transitional neighborhood was analyzed in light of the grouped and titled hexagons on the wall. It was ultimately decided to formulate a praying team of seven to ten people. They could meet on a weekly basis and could also function as a learning team with the expectation that weekly gatherings for prayer must be the fundamental solution for Christ's revelation of the church. This, in turn, could influence the other variables of the reinforcing loop in the system.

The question is, "How do we revitalize the declining denominational church in a transitional neighborhood and turn it around toward a dynamic multicultural church by accepting the challenge 1) to explore the strategic revelation of the church, 2) to establish visionary prayer, 3) to identify, appoint and empower leaders of continuous learning, and 4) to practically proclaiming and researching what is actually working in the community to reach the lost for the Kingdom of God?" 49 answers to this question were collected from the participants who attended the sessions (Table 12). Later they were all categorized according to the common denominators around which they cluster as shown in Table 13.

The initial causal loop diagram illustrates how strategic revelation influences visionary prayer which in turn influences the learning and leadership team. God's love for the whole world is the strategic revelation. Strategic revelation is a leverage point chosen here as an entry point into the system. The leadership team influences the proclamation of the Gospel which in turn influences the community connection leading to strategic revelation. The learning and leadership team can directly influence the strategic revelation just like the

proclamation of the Gospel can influence the strategic revelation. Once again all these entities can work well in a safe environment.

We are living in a fallen world and therefore the necessity to learn from mistakes and learn from one another, is a vital need. Alignment promotes the vision without which the latter is unsuccessful. Also, unaligned leaders if they are empowered can become liabilities to the system. The leadership team in turn will be trained to find innovative ways for the proclamation of the Gospel. The proclamation of the Gospel sociologically and in multifarious ways with the underlying purpose of bringing people to Christ, will get the church connected to the community, which in turn will affect positively the strategic revelation of the growth, and strength of the church. The strategic revelation, visionary prayer, a learning leadership team, proclamation of the Gospel and community connection all work in the same direction as illustrated in the reinforcing part of the diagram leading to more growth in this vital system (Diagram 6).

Strategic growth of the church in the community should lead to more strategic revelation and thus could work in the same anticipated direction for the kingdom of God. The possibility exists in the system when more growth is achieved for leadership or individual leaders to become interested in the establishment of personal kingdoms leading the system in the opposite direction as illustrated in the balancing loop part of the diagram (Diagram 6) When infection gets in at this point because of self exaltation as opposed to Christ exaltation theological, physical and other barriers can get the system infected leading to dysfunctional leadership which in turn could cause more conflict. This process can prolong as long as the system endures leading more decline of the church as in the case of Mount Pleasant Baptist church, or the conflict in the system, could open the door for a turn

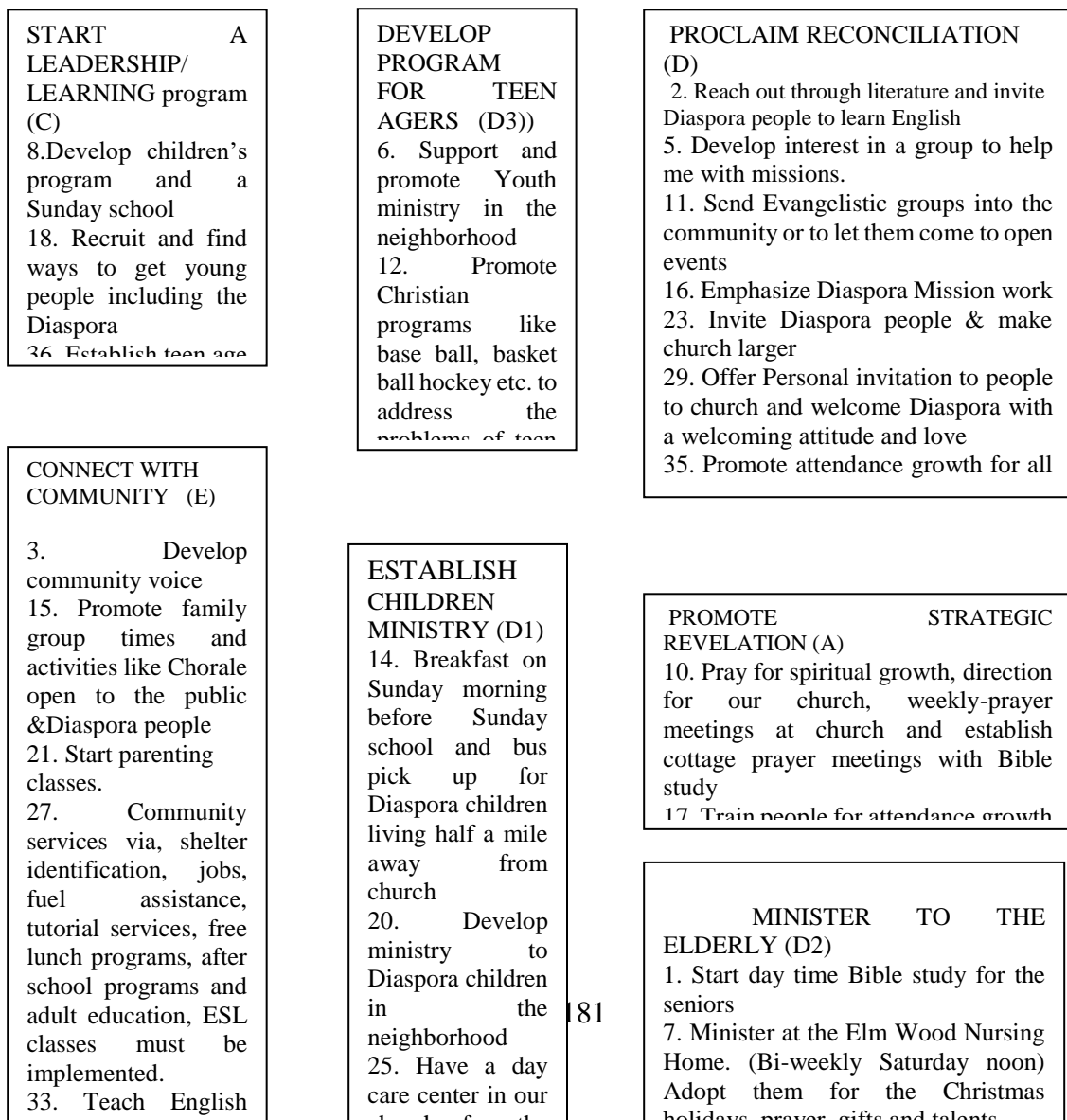
around strategy while looking for a strategic revelation and go toward the reinforcing part of the system.

Table 10. Hexagon Responses to the Question, “How Can Mount Pleasant Baptist Church Turn around in this Transitional Neighborhood?”

| | |
|---|--|
| 1. Start day time Bible study for seniors | 26. Talk to Diaspora people about church |
| 2. Reach out to Diaspora people through literature and start English as a second language classes for people in the community | 27. Start community services like jobs, fuel help, tutorial assistance, free lunch programs, after school programs and adult education |
| 3. Become community voice for Diaspora people | 28. Exercise more care for people in the church |
| 4. Establish praise celebration | 29. Invite personally, welcome Diaspora people with love and a pleasant attitude |
| 5. Develop interest in a group to help me with missions to Diaspora and all people groups. | 30. Start youth clubs for young men and women separately |
| 6. Support neighborhood youth ministry | 31. Start nursing home ministry & for shut-ins |
| 7. Minister at Elmwood Nursing Home | 32. Invite more Diaspora children to come |
| 8. Develop children’s program, Sunday school | 33. Teach English (ESL)for Diaspora people |
| 9. Start youth choir, organ, music program | 34. Start monthly church dinner/family group times |
| 10. Pray for spiritual growth, direction for our church, weekly-prayer meetings, home Bible study with prayer | 35. Find ways for growth of attendance for all ages from the Diaspora community |
| 11. Send evangelistic groups to the community or to have the Diaspora people come to open events | 36. Start teenage club Thursday or Friday nights |
| 12. Promote Christian sports like base ball and address teen violence, crime and drugs. | 37. Start outreach to the homeless and the Diaspora people |
| 13. Visit shut-ins at nursing homes & hospitals | 38. Visit Diaspora people in our neighborhood and start a day care center; Talk to people about church |
| 14. Pick up children from the Diaspora community and give breakfast before the Sunday school | 39. Get young families age between 22-32 as members from the Diaspora neighborhood |
| 15. Promote family times, open to Diaspora people | 40. Establish worship service for Diaspora people |
| 16. Emphasize Diaspora mission work which is vital | 41. Invite more Diaspora people to come |
| 17. Train people for growth & preserve interest | 42. Start a choir for teens; invite Diaspora people |
| 18. Find new ways to recruit Diaspora people | 43. Start food programs and visit the elderly |
| 19. Visit nursing homes with programs, music etc. | 44. Identify more activities for all children |
| 20. Start ministries to neighborhood children | 45. Match needs with help ads on bulletin board |

| | |
|---|---|
| 21. Start parenting classes | 46. Start Christmas carols for the neighborhood |
| 22. Promote sanctification through guidance and direction | 47. Work together to welcome and be friendly to new Diaspora and all people |
| 23. Invite Diaspora people to church for growth | 48. Walk in the neighborhood and introduce the church people as partners who are concerned about the souls and needs of Diaspora people |
| 24. Start activities for youth, invite Diaspora people | 49. Find a woman-teacher to teach Bible study |
| 25. Start day care center and find certified people | |

Table 11. Hexagon Clusters in Answer to the Question: “What is the role of reaching the Diaspora people, to turn around Mount Pleasant Baptist Church?”



DEVELOP AND PROMOTE VISIONARY PRAYER (B)

4. Establish Praise celebration for vision

9. Start a choir and play the organ as many of the older hymns make a wonderful service; Find young people for choir

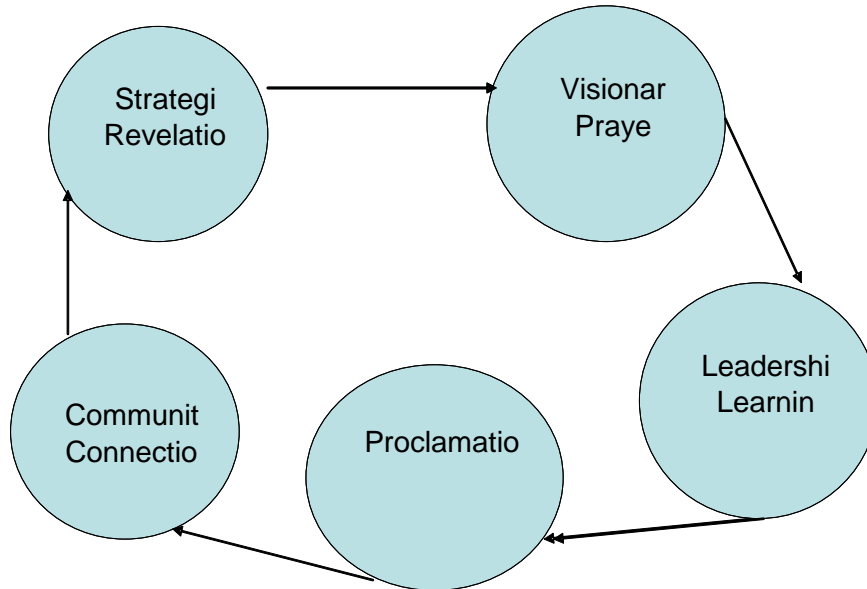
34. Start Church dinner monthly to invite Diaspora people and pray for family needs

40. Conduct weeknight worship service

Proclamation consists of ministry to children (D1), Ministry to the elderly (D2) and Ministry to the teens (D3)

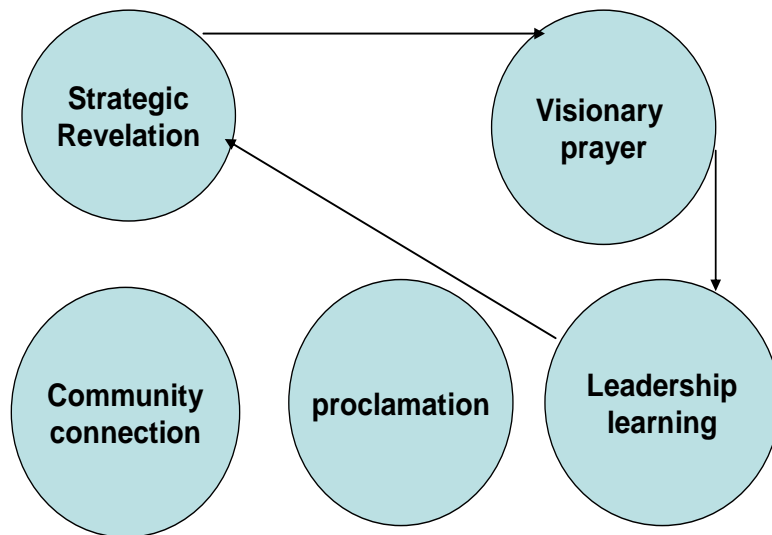
Diagram 1. Initial Causal Loop

Strategic Revelation of God's kingdom to reach the Diaspora people



Each of the entities in the above causal loop is connected to the other influencing the system positively. Prayer is vital. Visionary prayer in combination with leadership learning promotes strategic revelation as shown in the following diagram.

Diagram 2. Dynamics of Visionary prayer and Leadership learning
promotes Revelation of kingdom ministry to Diaspora people

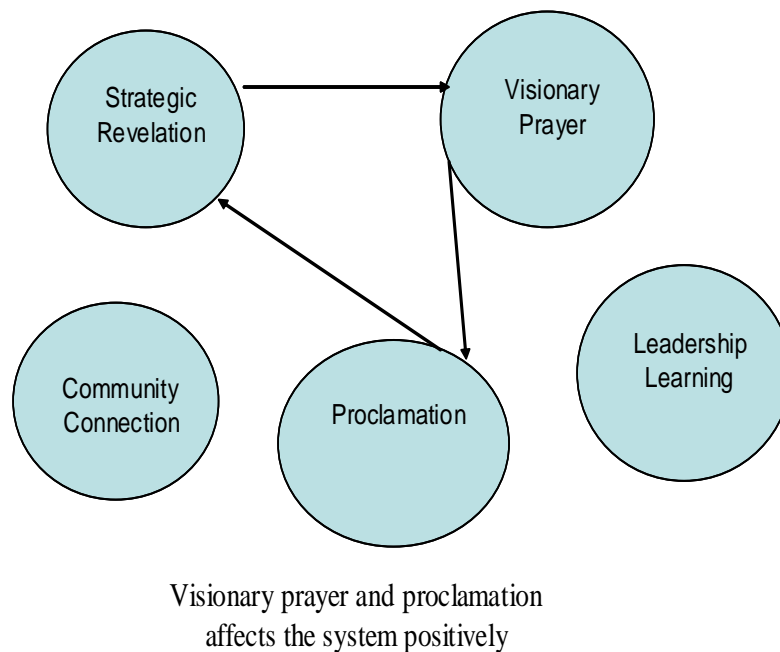


Visionary prayer and Leadership learning affects the system positively

Visionary prayer reveals the mind of God about the message of Christ to be proclaimed. The message of reconciliation to the community becomes a strategic revelation to the declining church to turnaround. Prayer seeks the mind of God and the Holy Spirit reveals strategically what exactly is the revelation of God for the church.

Visionary prayer is a key variable that promotes leadership on a continuous basis to look for doing God's will as the above diagram shows. Visionary prayer in combination with proclamation promotes strategic revelation as shown by the following diagram.

Diagram 3. Dynamics of Visionary Prayer & Proclamation
to promote revelation of kingdom ministry to Diaspora people

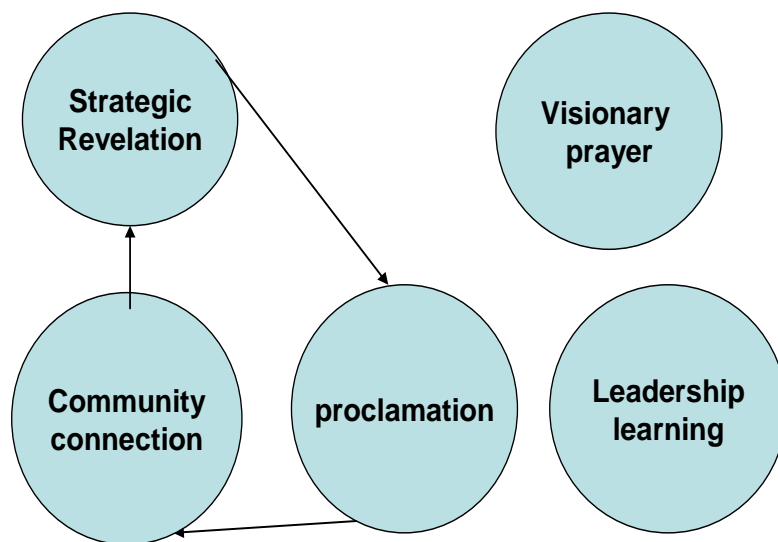


Dynamics of proclamation and communication influence the strategic revelation of the church. Proclamation of the message of reconciliation is connected to the community in the transitional neighborhood. Ministry to the Diaspora cannot be done unless God

gives a revelation of these people. Both proclamation and community connection affect the system very positively as the following diagram shows.

Diagram 4. Dynamics of Proclamation and Community Connection

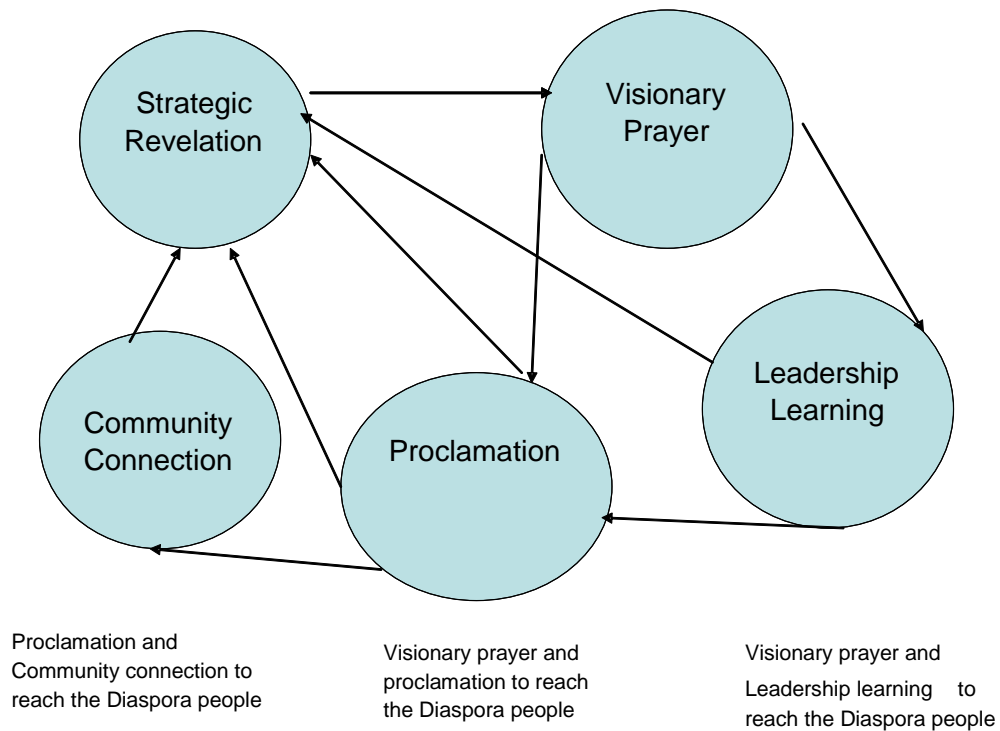
promotes Revelation of kingdom ministry to Diaspora people, which can turn around a declining denominational church



Dynamics of proclamation of reconciliation and community connection affects the system positively

Each of the following entities in the system is interconnected. Each one affects the other positively in the system. The following diagram 5 shows how all the entities interact with one another systemically.

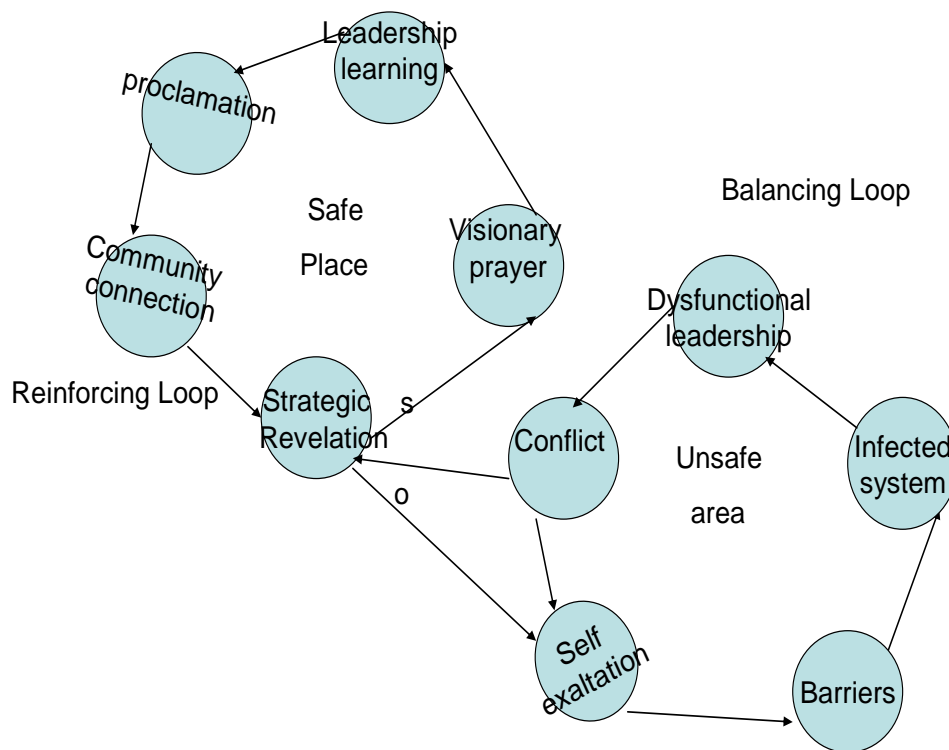
Diagram 5. Dynamics of Combination of Entities
to promote revelation of ministry to Diaspora people



The reinforcing loop in the following diagram 6 details how each of the entities strategic revelation, visionary prayer, leadership learning, and community connection are

interrelated. They move in the same direction as the letter, “s” shows in the diagram. Each entity reinforces the other in the same direction without becoming an obstacle in the system. The balancing loop demonstrates how the system could go wrong because of conflict leading to dysfunctional leadership which in turn infects the system. Barriers become obvious caused by the infected system promoting self exalted leaders who control the system for their own kingdom, and not for God’s kingdom. If the balancing loop moves in the opposite direction as pointed out by the letter, “o” the monitoring device signals to watch out for systemic failure to correct the system with accuracy.

Diagram 6. Reinforcing and Balancing Loop



How to promote God’s love to Diaspora people

The diagram above shows how the church can be positive in promoting the church growth in receiving a strategic revelation and giving the message of reconciliation to the Diaspora people. Each entity in the diagram is reinforcing the other in the same direction. The strategic revelation is connected to visionary prayer, leadership, proclamation of the gospel (through ministries to children D1, the elderly D2 and the teens D3), and community connection. This interconnection is vital in bringing reconciliation to the Diaspora people. The Early Church preached with outstanding results because of the strategic revelation which in turn was connected to visionary prayer, leadership learning, proclamation of the gospel through various ministries, and connection to the communities. There was joy in the cities in spite of severe persecution. People were reconciled to God. If the system moves in the opposite direction, the church can produce self-exaltation of individuals leading to barriers, infected system, dysfunctional leadership and conflict.

The case studies conducted in the three churches led to individual interviews with people who gave several examples of self-exaltation of individuals who caused barriers (withholding information, secret connections between small groups, gossip, backbiting, observance of worship formalities etc.) infected system(filled with corruption, exploitation, embezzlement, materialism etc.), dysfunctional leadership (leaders ruling with fear, intimidation, threats, excommunication etc.) and conflict (power struggle usually between the deacons and the pastor). Hexagoning could not be done in these churches because people were hesitant to speak publicly about these negative things.

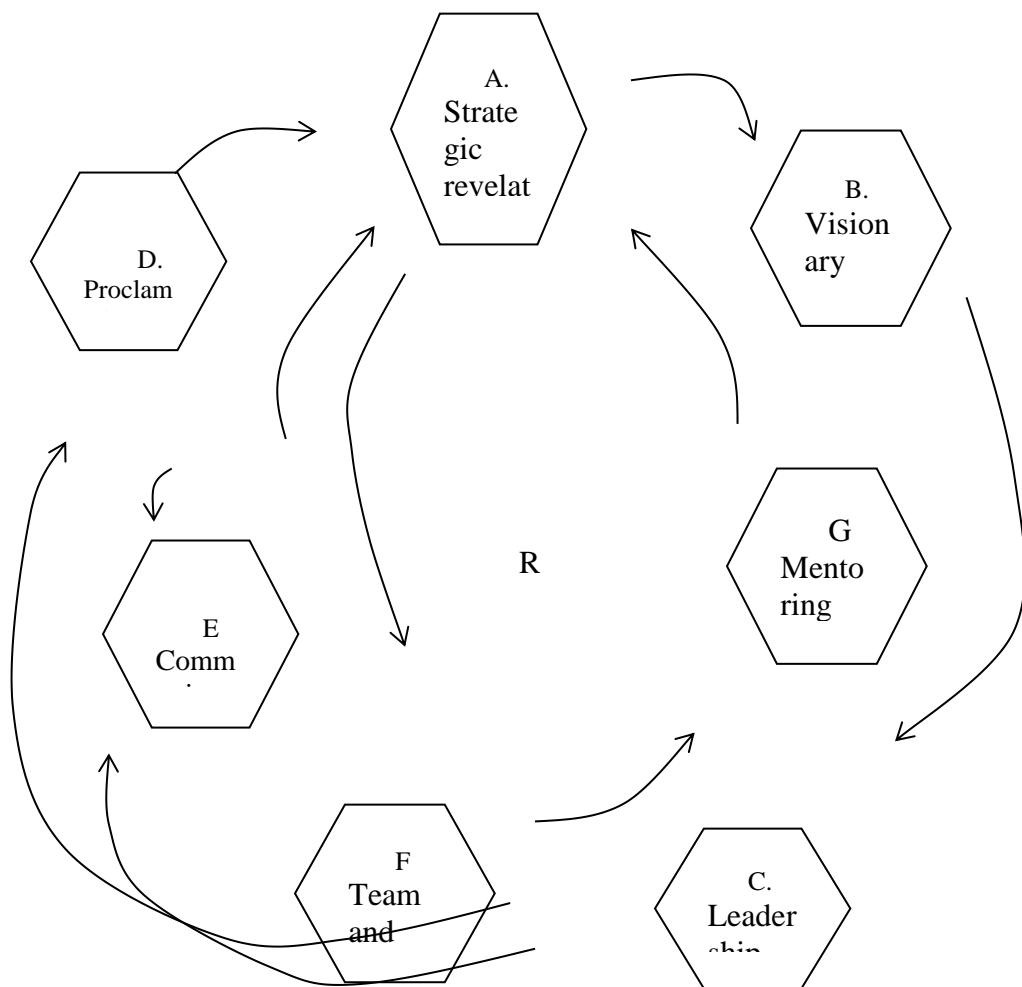
The sensitive information was given by several people in private interviews with an understanding that their names would not be disclosed. The negative loop was the result of private information. Also, information obtained from 7-10 pastors of ABC,USA who have

had a turnaround experience individually described some of the horrible experiences they have gone through prior to turnaround completion. My wife has website access to many of the pastors' wives who have contributed to some of the negative loop information which was used to test the validity of the information collected for the negative loop at the case study churches. One of the pastors hesitated to come back to his church after the summer vacation. The chair of the deacons was antagonistic to him as he had been to the previous pastors. This problem continued for several years until God turned the situation around. Things began to change gradually as the pastor caught the glimpse of strategic revelation and the people received the same revelation slowly. God had really called this man of God to withstand the forces of evil in the church. In another case, a deacon got saved in one of the churches where no pastor could survive. He confronted the deacon board and pointed out the fact that the pastor should not be seen as a threat. When I joined MPBC as pastor in 2004, a few deacons had premeditated opinions of a pastor as a symbol of tyranny. I have had several opportunities to resist the power of Satan with the power of the Holy Spirit without whose help I would not have survived this church. I am not afraid to confront anyone for the sake of the Christ with the message of the cross to bring reconciliation. Pastors have to concentrate on the balancing loop without being negligent to monitoring the negative loop. The balancing loop works here as a balancing device to monitor the system to avoid moving negatively.

Two dynamic variables are added onto the previous diagram 5 to form the new Hexagon dynamics as shown below (Diagram 7). Evangelism and mentoring can prevent a church from declining.

Diagram 7. Hexagon Dynamics

to show how the Christian church can prevent decline in a transitional neighborhood



AFGA -ABCDA– ABCEA- ABCDEA

Strategic revelation of God's kingdom in the church can foster visionary prayer growth, leadership learning, proclamation, community connection, Team/personal evangelism and mentoring leadership

The hexagon dynamics in the above diagram 7 illustrate how all the entities interact in multifarious ways. Strategic revelation is an entry point in this hexagon dynamics connecting to Visionary Prayer, Leadership Learning and Community Connection. Strategic Revelation as pointed out earlier speaks of God's love for the entire world. It is the love of God which prompted Jesus to reconcile the world through His sacrifice on the cross. God's love is for all people. It was the love of God that prompted Nehemiah's vision of building the wall and getting the Israelites reconciled to God (Diagram 13). Nehemiah's strategic revelation of God's love led him to visionary prayer and all other aspects of the reconciliation program until he successfully accomplished God's vision. Diagram 5, diagram 7, diagram 13 and table 12 are all connected. Visionary prayer reveals the mind of God about Christ's message of reconciliation to be proclaimed to the community. Visionary prayer becomes a strategic necessity to mobilize leaders with the same revelation to reconcile the world to God. Leaders have to be aligned to the vision of the church before being enabled. They need to continuously learn to get connected to the community which will help the declining church to turnaround.

The two entities specifically added onto these Hexagon dynamics, are vital to the system based on all the lessons learned from the case studies. Team-based evangelism and Personal Evangelism in combination with Mentoring of Leaders are the most unavoidable

entities in a Christian Church as attested by P and S in Table 12. The variables P and S reflect the disciples who are willing to take the challenge of team-based/personal evangelism coupled with mentoring. The vitality and growth of the church is depended on team-based/personal evangelism and mentoring. Church growth cannot happen without these two variables.

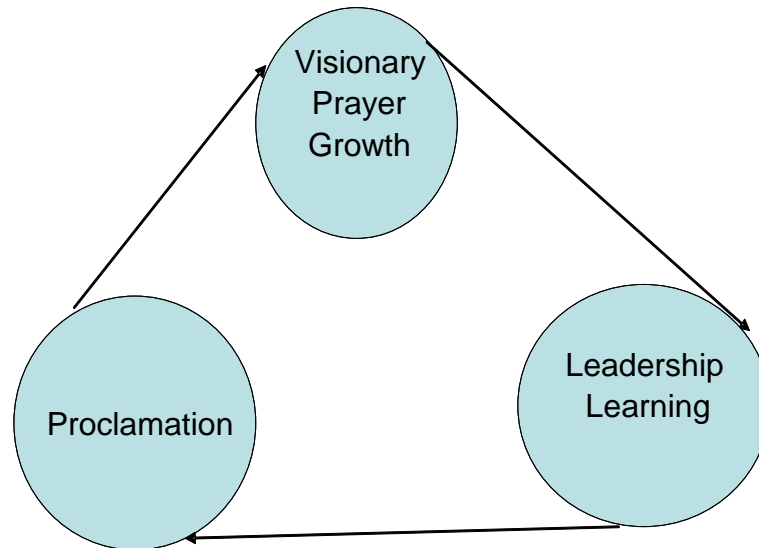
Personal evangelism is very difficult and the Spirit of God has to specifically lead people in this very important ministry. This ministry of the Early Church is not emphasized in the Christian church today for various reasons. Team based evangelism is possible if people can be trained (mentored) in groups of two or three. Jesus himself trained His disciples and sent them two by two. Just like Jesus trained and mentored His disciples during His earthly ministry, the pastor of the church has to train/mentor his /her people until the trainees become trainers themselves. Training/mentoring is a key for multiplication numbers in the productive sense. Henrietta Mears was able to accomplish very significant work among the youth of America in the twentieth century. She influenced hundreds of teachers all across America and they discovered, “Her principle was to train her own leaders.”²⁰⁷ What one person cannot do alone, can be done in a group of two or three people.

Lack of prayer as shown in the following diagram 8 can be detrimental to the system. The Spirit of God cannot move without prayer. There won't be power while witnessing for Christ in the community whether it is personal evangelism or team-based evangelism. This is the negative aspect of the system to monitor in the church. Every thing else in the system may be functioning properly but with no fruit. It becomes like works-based system

²⁰⁷ Ethel Baldwin and David Benson, *Henrietta Mears and how she did it!*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1983), 85.

with no productive results. A praying church is a growing and living church with all the systems working properly.

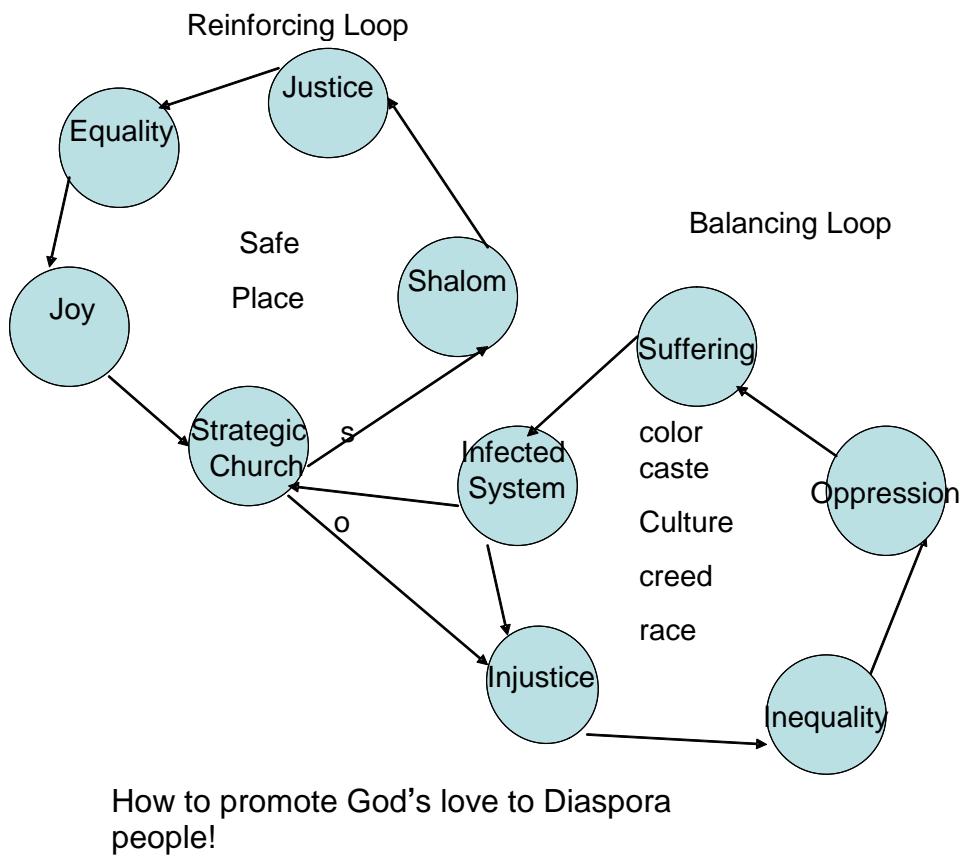
Diagram 8. Visionary Prayer affects Leadership learning leading to proclamation



The following diagram 9 shows how the church can be positive in promoting the love of God in giving the message of reconciliation to the Diaspora people. Each entity in the diagram is reinforcing the other in the same direction. The strategic church is connected to shalom, justice, equality and joy. This interconnection is vital in bringing reconciliation to the Diaspora people. When Philip preached in Samaria, there was joy in the city as the Samaritans were reconciled to God. If the system moves in the opposite direction, the

church can cause injustice, inequality, oppression and suffering either directly or indirectly to Diaspora people by not giving the message of reconciliation and thus exploiting them because they are outsiders of the system. The balancing loop works here as a balancing device to monitor the system to avoid moving negatively.

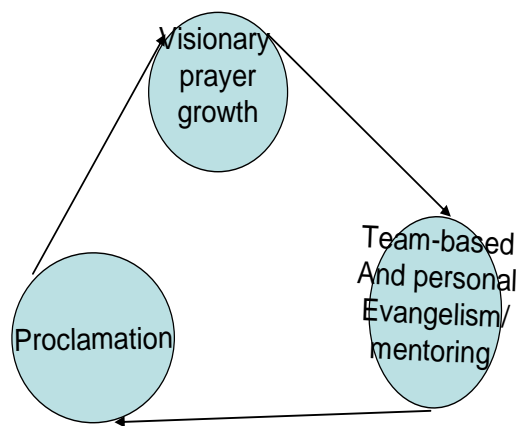
Diagram 9. Promoting God's love to Diaspora People



Diaspora outreach can be done with visionary prayer, personal and team based evangelism, and mentoring without which outreach to Diaspora or any people is not possible as illustrated by the following Diagram 10.

Diagram 10. Lack of Visionary Prayer

affects Team-based and Personal Evangelism leading to
no proclamation



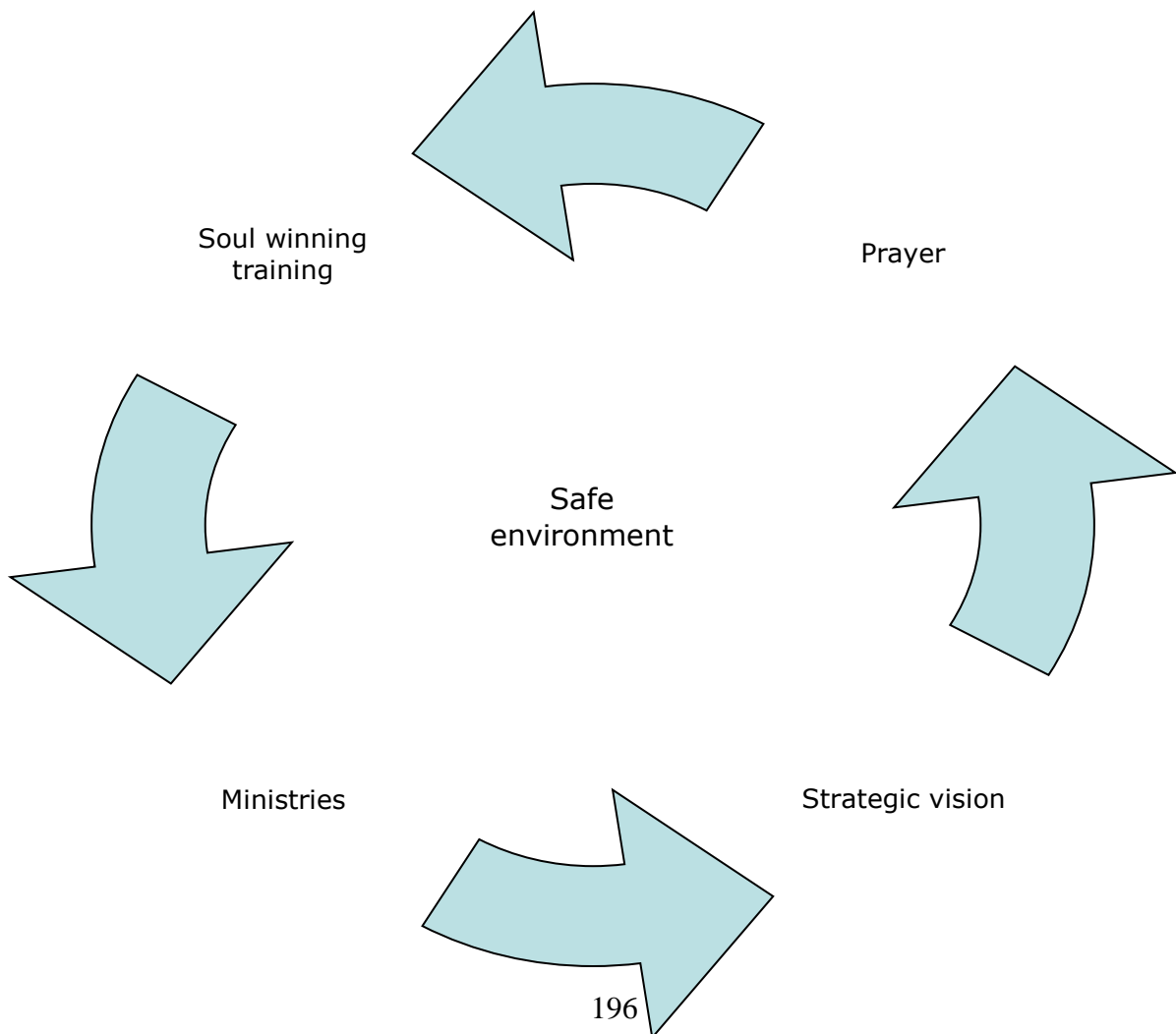
Visionary prayer, evangelism and proclamation
affects the system positively

Leaders have to be mentors in training people to win the Diaspora for Christ. If the

leaders have visionary prayer they can be trained to become the best trainers to train others to share the gospel. It is impossible without visionary prayer to win souls for Christ. The Holy Spirit can operate with power but not without prayer. The final chapter of this project will explore further about this vital section of the Diaspora evangelism.

The following diagram shows the vitality of a church. It serves as a soul-winning model.

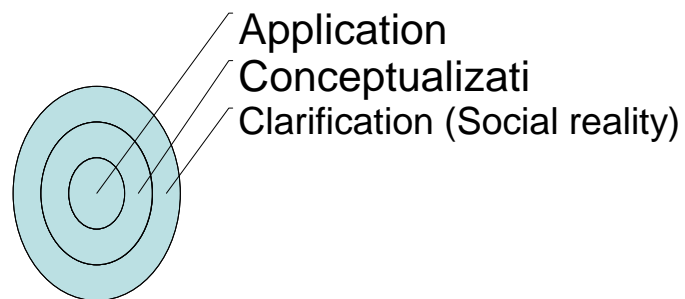
Diagram 11. Vitality of the System (Soul-winning Model)



The vitality of the system has to be nurtured for the life of the church to continue for ever. That is the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had a strategic vision for His Church which is His body. The Christian church today must have a strategic vision of Christ to follow the same pattern of His Church. The blue print of His church cannot be changed. Jesus was a man of prayer and He was filled with the Spirit of God. Prayer energized Him with the power to cast out demons who attempted to hamper His ministry. He trained His followers as disciples to follow exactly what He had shown them. The message, the method and the model of the Master can be followed by His disciples today just like the Early Church did for His glory. Jesus knew the social reality and, applied His scriptural and confrontational strategies to deliver people. Ministers of the gospel have to educate the church people about Dr. Villafañe's Hermeneutic Circle to see social reality for clarification, scriptural reality for conceptualization and application of reality for confrontation as shown in the following (Diagram 12). Jesus understood the social reality of the Samaritan woman and her background information. He identified with her social reality of pain, oppression and rejection by the Jews. The chosen people had nothing to do with the Samaritans. Jesus did not talk about the reality of the living water nor did He offer the living water right way. Identification with the social reality opened the door for the ministry of scriptural reality (Conceptualization). Exaltation of the meaningfulness and the permanence of the living water could not be rejected. The Diaspora woman was ready for the living water. At this point Christ was ready for confrontation in asking her to bring

her husband. This relational point of delivery of eternal life is the best application of giving the gospel.

Diagram 12. Hermeneutic Circle



Three movements of social reality, scriptural reality and confrontational reality in the Hermeneutic circle:

Systemic and Theological application of principles and methods

We have seen in this chapter the case studies of three different churches about how they operated systemically by changing the system within the church and turning the churches around for God's glory. All these churches have learned individually to work together as one solid group even though different ministries have been undertaken by different groups in the same church. They did it with a strategic revelation of the kingdom of God followed by visionary prayer, leadership learning, proclamation of the gospel and community connection. They were trained to work individually in some cases but in most cases, they were mentored and trained to work in small groups to be very productive. Statistical analysis of their methods, principles and models will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. By adopting the methods, models and principles of these learning teams, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church can experience a turnaround in this transitional neighborhood. The role of reaching the Diaspora people is not only an opportunity but a necessity as well for the expansion of the kingdom of God.

PART 3: CONFRONTATION

CHAPTER SIX

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA PEOPLE IN TURNING AROUND A DECLINING DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH BY MAKING THE CONNECTION TO THE TRANSITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD

Short synopsis of lessons learned through the Learning Teams

Systemic analysis of the role of the Diaspora people in turning around a declining denominational church in a transitional neighborhood, has resulted in concrete evidence for implementation. Our findings can significantly assist us in making the confrontation. The leader has to make an assessment of the situation theologically, sociologically and strategically before making an operational plan for the change process. He has to find a core group of people to share the vision for support. Systemically speaking, fundamental problems need fundamental solutions to avoid counterproductive consequences. A “concrete action plan,” according to Dr. Villafañe, is necessary to make a successful confrontation for God’s glory.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Eldin Villafañe, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary Class Lecture (Boston, MA), *The “Hermeneutic Circle” in Social Ethics*, 12 June, 2006.

Having had a fundamental analysis of the reasons for decline of a denominational church in a transitional neighborhood, we can point out with accuracy the dysfunctional leadership, lack of vision, infection in the system and other multifarious variables that cause decline. Assessment of the conflict in the system can point out an entry point as to where to start with the change process. The Bible has an answer to the causes of decline and the remedies for a turnaround. The Christian Church has to apply God's principles in God's way for a lasting systemic solution to the problems. Nehemiah assessed the situation with God's people in Babylonian captivity. Alienation is the fundamental problem in the system today as it was in the days of Nehemiah. This is the first place to start just like Nehemiah did. Alienation can lead to acceptance, assurance and assertion. After assessing the Nehemiah plan, we can analyze what the Early Church did in their ministry to the Jews and the Gentiles. The principles/keys that the Early Church adopted could be analyzed in the context of the lessons learned through the learning team. The case studies which were conducted at Trinity Covenant Church, Manchester, CT, The First Congregational Church of Hebron, CT and The First Congregational Church of Revere, MA will shed light on some practical principles to be applied to a declining denominational church to turnaround in a transitional neighborhood. If the Christian Church is willing to do God's will on this earth, kingdom qualifying criteria is possible leading to kingdom winning criteria for the church to be the salt and the light of the world. First things first; let us analyze alienation from a biblical perspective.

Alienation: Nehemiah's picture of the wall (Need of Reconciliation)

Preventive Prediction and pain

Human conflict at MPBC has been very similar to what Nehemiah saw before the building of the Wall. Nehemiah had a strategic revelation of God's love for His people. It became a vision from God to build the wall and get the Israelite reconciled to God. The hexagon dynamics and the Diagram 13 are related. The Israelites could have avoided captivity and the destruction of the wall. They disobeyed and found themselves in that predicament. Prediction of this predicament was deliberately ignored. Sin alienated them from God despite the fact that they were the chosen people. All humanity is alienated from God because of sin. Conflict with one another is the consequence of sin. Life is full of conflicts of one type or the other. People see conflict with many perspectives. The societies of Socrates, Solzhenitsyn, Leo Tolstoy, Gandhi and Nehemiah were more or less the same as far as human conflict in their time was concerned but they stood against the evils of conflict with the best moral courage. Socrates analyzed conflict from an ethical perspective and was the first to make the well known statement that the proper study of mankind is man. His moral consciousness was so great that he vehemently opposed false pretences and conceit. Also, he sought consistently to awaken in people moral consciousness and ability towards self-knowledge with respect to an end and value of human action. His enemies could not oppose his moral courage but could only find a way to kill him by falsely accusing him of corrupting the minds of young people.

Nehemiah's society was of the Jews who were enslaved but this conflict could have been similar to that of Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear. These Shakespearean plays are examples of human conflict and are considered by scholars the greatest dramas ever written. The Israelites were alienated from God and they were so spiritually dead that prophetic warning from God did not make sense to them (Diagram 13). People are either

physically dead or spiritually dead. Rebellion against God causes spiritual deadness in people even though they are physically alive.

Jesus directed **the spiritually dead** people (the alienated people) to bury the physically dead people while encouraging the spiritually alive to go and preach the Gospel by following Him. Also, Jesus used one of the most important images about spiritual blindness when He referred to the two types of people in the world (A) **the seeing blind** and (B) **the sightless blind**. The seeing blind have a conflict within themselves and they say that they could see but they actually can't. On the contrary the sightless blind are those who are blind but they accept the presence of conflict within and encounter Jesus to bring about the change critically needed. Nehemiah and those who were willing to rebuild the wall, were sightless blind but their eyes were opened up to see the dilapidation of the wall. Nehemiah's vision was accepted to rebuild the wall (Diagram 13). The blind man in John chapter 9 was set free both spiritually and physically while the Pharisees were blinded more for being unwilling to see. Jesus asserted boldly that He had come for judgment into this world that, "they who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind" (John 9:39).

Passionless Piety or Hope

People have had a false sense of piety or hope, assuming that peace will come one of these days. People are going in circles going from false hope to religious hope to emotional hope to passionless hope to alienation, and the conflict seems to never end except with the greatest deception of the loss of the blessed hope which is a promise to those who are born of the Spirit of God. Religious hope of religious people keeps piety, in a comfortable base until they get fully drenched into this pharisaic piety which Jesus

Himself encountered with His strongest reprehension. Many professing Christians are happy if their minister adopts a low standard and entertains everybody. They are pleased with an exhibition of Christianity. It serves their main plan and helps them maintain what could be called comfortable hope. Professing Christians are in conflict with God; they ignore warning from God. Israelites were in conflict with God and with themselves, and they ignored all warnings from God given through Jeremiah thus being forced into Babylonian captivity according to the prophecy. Alienation leads to acceptance in the Beloved. It is the only alternative for eternal life.

Acceptance-Kingdom Qualifying Criteria: Nehemiah's Commission

God cares for His creation and man is the paragon of animals despite the fact that he is the quintessence of dust as Hamlet envisioned the human drama. We are created in the image of God and the Lord God has had a redemptive plan even before the foundations of the world. Nehemiah saw the conflict within and without the heart of everyone of the Jewish community of his time living in captivity and how their alienation from God had resulted in one conflict after the other, causing nothing but passionless piety and painful consequences of captivity and false hope. He wanted to do something about it, analyzing the foundational problems of sin and departure from the Holy God. He saw the house of the Lord in ruins along with the dilapidation of the Wall. He desired to do something about it for the glory of God and to turn around the situation with God's people. Little did he realize that his agonized approach to God would result in God's commission to him to rebuild The Wall.

Missiological studies and Apostle Paul's strategy should be taken seriously while thinking of the Latino community and its churches in the city. The theological basis of Pauline leadership development as divine initiative is an excellent approach to ministry. Without a divine call to ministry it is fundamentally a systemic problem and all other aspects of leadership are of no avail, regardless of their merits in the first place. A "man sent from God" exactly like John the Baptist is the solution to Mount Pleasant because fundamental problems in the system require fundamental solutions and not linear solutions which can be counterproductive in the long run. Acceptance brings transformation and establishes assurance.

Assurance: Nehemiah's confidence in God

Theology of Peace

Jesus said, "In Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). People take pills for anxiety. The secret wound of modern men and women seems to be anxiety. The people of Israel made a peace offering for the covering of sin, symbolically representing the True Peace Offering which was yet to come through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. The blood of Jesus was shed once and for all to cleanse us from sin and not as a covering of sin. It was a permanent solution of cleansing and not a temporal solution of covering. It is the atonement of Christ that brings reconciliation to people in declining churches and this message of reconciliation can be given to the Diaspora people. While discussing, "The Process of the Gospel," Dr. Douglas Hall asserts that in meeting people's basic need, we bring: "The basic and fundamental answer to people, the one

answer that will be the basis for solving all others-a salvation which is thoroughly redemptive.”²⁰⁹ The message of the cross brings reconciliation to all people including the Diaspora people. Assurance of salvation leads the disciples of Christ to become ambassadors for Him. With proper training and mentoring, the ambassadors can assert the reign of God with power.

Assertion-Kingdom Winning Criteria

Theology of Place

Nehemiah had to position himself in the place of God, in accordance with the purpose of God and the plan of God. The Kingdom qualifying criteria had brought Nehemiah to the ball park but his Kingdom winning criteria was going to ultimately determine whether or not he was going to win the game (battle) in the spiritual sense (Diagram 13).

The city is an advocate and the church is placed amidst all these systems in the city so that the presence, prayers, proclamation of the message of the kingdom of God and the practice of kingdom principles by the church will constitute a powerful witness in the city. Justice to the poor and their empowerment, and the liberation of the powerful could lead to the reformulation of the city according to kingdom principles.

²⁰⁹ Douglas Hall and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope* (Rough Draft; not yet published), 43.

Faithfulness in being a witness with its life, work and witness, the church must be a sign of the kingdom. The incarnational vision of Christ was to complete the task of sacrifice, and nothing could deter Him from this vision. Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out, “He died on the cross alone, abandoned by His disciples. With him were crucified not two of His followers but two murderers.”²¹⁰

The Apostle Paul was able to see the inability of the church in not being able to fulfill the purpose of the kingdom in the city because of lack of community oneness. Being a true community of believers with purity and peace, the church can be a powerful witness to impact the city with the gospel. The broader vision of the kingdom is a must for the purpose of the existence of the church. The Halls assert, “Denominations that grow in concert with the overall growth of the faith tend to grow more than those which focus only on their own system. Christianity operates as a broad inter-relational system and the local context we are working in is part of a broader total dynamic that is networking with that system in the accomplishment of visions, objectives and goals.”²¹¹ The inter-relational dynamics has been missing at MPBC for several years. It has been a proven fact that the community oneness at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church has so dramatically deteriorated that the people outside the church have concluded that the church has been closed for the past few years.

The church, as people should practice ethics both inside and outside the church. Ethical consciousness of God’s people is a testimony, if practiced personally and organizationally. People have a general misperception about the church as a place filled with hypocrites. By living as a testimony, the church can demonstrate that it is not so. As

²¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 38.

²¹¹ Douglas Hall and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope* (Rough Draft; not yet published), 97.

a great example and witness, the church can reconcile the city to God. The assertion of the message should be interlinked with the Master's sacrificial death on the cross. The centrality and the grand finality of the answers to questions of (a) indomitable justice, (b) celestial peace, (c) unmerited forgiveness, (d) infinite love, (e) eternal hope, (f) mystery of evil and (g), of everlasting joy find their most exceptional satisfaction on the cross. The centrality of the Paul's preaching was on the preaching of the cross and he was not ashamed of it. Christianity without the cross is not Christianity at all. The vitality of Christianity is the message of the cross on which love was demonstrated. Every follower of Christ has to bear the cross to be the light of the world. Bonhoeffer points out, "The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest."²¹² The Church at Jerusalem serving as headquarters, and later from Antioch, seemed to operate effectively, based on this sevenfold essence of the message of the cross.

Seven Keys to the Book of Acts

Over the years, I have read the Book of Acts and discovered seven different keys which I have used over and over again in ministry to all people including the Diaspora people. The Early Church had the following seven great keys to unlock the ministry mysteries. There are four keys from a human stand point and three keys from divine stand point, which were the greatest source for the most powerful ministry in the Early Church.

(1) **Visionary-prayer:** The Apostles were determined, according to Acts 6:4 to, "give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 1:8). Intensity of prayer increased as persecution increased. Peter was in prison but, "constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church" as the scripture points out in Acts 12:5. Their

²¹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 89.

kingdom vision was propelled by incessant prayer. Vision of the kingdom of God opens the door of ministry to the Diaspora people, which in turn could intensify prayer in the church.

(2) **The most matchless unity:** was a testament to the fact that the disciples won the battle against the demoniac powers very successfully while preaching the Word with the greatest effectiveness (Acts 1:14, 2:1, 46, 4:24, 12:5). They were all, “with one accord” Acts 4:24. When Paul was stoned and was left for dead, the believers gathered around him and prayed. The church prayed corporately until Peter was released from the prison (Acts: 12:12). God’s people need to be united to do God’s work which includes ministry to the Diaspora people.

(3) **The most sacrificial sincerity:** was evidenced in the ministry of the Early Church (Acts: 20:27, 31, 33-36). The Apostle Paul speaks of his own sincerity in II Corinthians: 1:12, “For in our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience, that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.” Paul maintained his sincerity till the end of his life just like Joshua did (Joshua 24:14).

(4) **The most indefatigable imperturbability:** was evidenced in the disciples and especially in the Apostle Paul. (Acts: 4:20; 20:27, 31, 33-36). Peter and the other apostles made it clear to the high priest and the council, “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Fear, did neither grip them nor did it stop them from witnessing. Paul was not afraid of any one including the other apostles (Acts: 20:27, 31, 33-36). He was stoned for preaching but survived miraculously after the stone throwing mob had left him for dead. He was so courageous and emboldened to go back to Iconium (where the stone

throwing mob was ready to kill him) to preach without being perturbed in any way. Nothing could perturb him.

Visionary prayer, unity, sincerity and imperturbability were the greatest assets for the apostles and all the disciples who followed and served Jesus in the Early Church. These human keys can work just like they did for the apostles and all the faithful followers of Christ. God means business with us when we mean business with Him. The following 3 divine keys worked in coordination with the 4 human keys.

(5) **The Name of Jesus:** (Acts: 2:21,38; 3:6; 3:16; 4:7,10,12,17,18,19,20,21; 5:28,40; 10:38,48;15:14,26; 19:17). The apostles and all the disciples exalted the Name of Jesus. They were motivated for one supreme reason, and that was to magnify the matchless Name of Jesus. They proclaimed the word with all boldness even after they were beaten for the name of the Lord Jesus. It was an honor for them to suffer shame for that Name.

(6)**The Holy Spirit:** (Luke 24:49), (Acts 1:8; 8:19; 9:17 ; 10; 38; 11:24;13:2, 52) Paul was, “filled with the Holy Spirit” when he set his eyes on Elymas the sorcerer who withstood him until the power of the Holy Spirit struck Elymas blind leading to the conversion of the deputy (Acts: 13: 9-12). The Holy Spirit was in charge of the ministry of the Early Church. The Holy Spirit designated people for ministry according to His own choice. “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me, Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ ” (Acts 13: 2). Also, it is asserted again that they were, “sent out by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:4). It was the Holy Spirit who spoke to Peter to go to the home of Cornelius, the Centurion (Acts10: 19-20).

(7)**The Word of God:** is one of the major divine keys for the success of the ministry of the Early Church. Ministry of the word was the highest call of every apostle and

disciple that followed Jesus in the Early Church (Acts 6: 4) (Psalm 107:20; 119:89,138:2; John 1:1, 8:31, 32, 12: 48; Matt.24:15 Luke 4:4, Heb. 4:12) (Acts: Chapter 16). It is the word of God that asserts that people are alienated from God but are accepted in the beloved. If acceptance in Christ is accepted, the Holy Spirit gives the alienated people assurance. Assurance of reconciliation with God gives them God's number one job to be His ambassadors. With proper training and mentoring in both personal and team-based evangelism, these ambassadors can assert or proclaim the message of reconciliation in the community to all people including the Diaspora people. This is like Nehemiah's mission to turnaround and to rebuild the wall (Diagram 13). If the ambassadors do their job the Holy Spirit will do His job. If the four keys from the human stand point work well, the three divine keys will do the job in the most wonderful way. The Early Church used these seven keys to unlock the door of evangelism and proclaimed the gospel to both Jews and gentiles and turned the then known world, right side up in two years. Our goal at Mount Pleasant is to follow this pattern in reaching the Diaspora people for Christ, which in turn has the greatest potential to turnaround the declining denominational church.

Application of seven keys to test lessons learned from Case Studies

The three churches (Trinity Covenant Church, Manchester, CT., The First Congregational Church of Hebron, CT. and The First Congregational Church of Revere, Revere, MA; Case Studies) had all these seven-point turnaround characteristics. Visionary prayer, unity, sincerity and imperturbability were explicit at the human level. Based on these entities they were able to tap on the divine keys of the matchless Name of Jesus, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. The following statistical analysis of these churches reveals their vitality, vision and vivaciousness which were measured with the yardstick of

their message, method and motivation. The following statistical analysis illustrates their successful practice.

Method

Participants

Seven individuals were selected for this research and an experimental group. They were chosen because of the validity of their testimonies of transformation, training and mentoring. These individuals were chosen to reflect on their witnessing capacities before they received training and mentoring (Table 12). The Variable P represents the transformed people before and after training/mentoring. The Variable S represents the transformed people with and without training/mentoring. Both variables P and S are saved people who were tested before and after they were trained and mentored. Jesus trained and mentored His disciples. The objective of the test was to evaluate training and mentoring on the saved people. All those whom God calls to be His disciples do not stop at salvation. They should be willing to live and die for Jesus as His witnesses. These disciples need to be trained and mentored, and they (represented by P and S in Table 12) score the highest points of 35 because of team-based and personal evangelism coupled with mentoring. The effectiveness of the evaluation on the two variables P and S contributed to the addition of two categories in Diagram 7. By adding variable F (Team and Personal Evangelism) and variable G (Mentoring Leaders) to the hexagon dynamics in diagram 7, the Christian church can prevent decline in a transitional neighborhood. Another experimental/control – pre/post evaluation was conducted on the administrative evaluation scores for the mentors (pastors, trainers and deacons) to test the hypothesis that their participation in the mentoring program would benefit them (Table 13).

Apparatus

The importance of sharing the gospel of Christ was measured using the “Doctrinal Evaluation Form,” created for this purpose (See Appendix 3 for a copy of this form). The validity of the training and mentoring experience leading to the effectiveness of sharing the gospel was measured as a whole using the, “The Soul-winning Model” created by the writer of this thesis to be published in a few years (Diagram 11). The evaluation form is part of the soul-winning model.

Procedure

The doctrinal evaluation form was given to all the participants of this case study to examine their belief and sharing experience both before and after, training and mentoring. Statistical Results of the case studies of the three churches:

Descriptive Statistics

Two variables were critical to the test of this hypothesis. P and S were chosen for this experiment to be tested in 7 candidates both during the pre-test period and post-test period. Again, during both these periods all the seven candidates were tested as experimental (mentored) group and as control group (non-mentored). Seven mentors (pastors, deacons and leaders) played a vital role to weigh the performance of the participants.

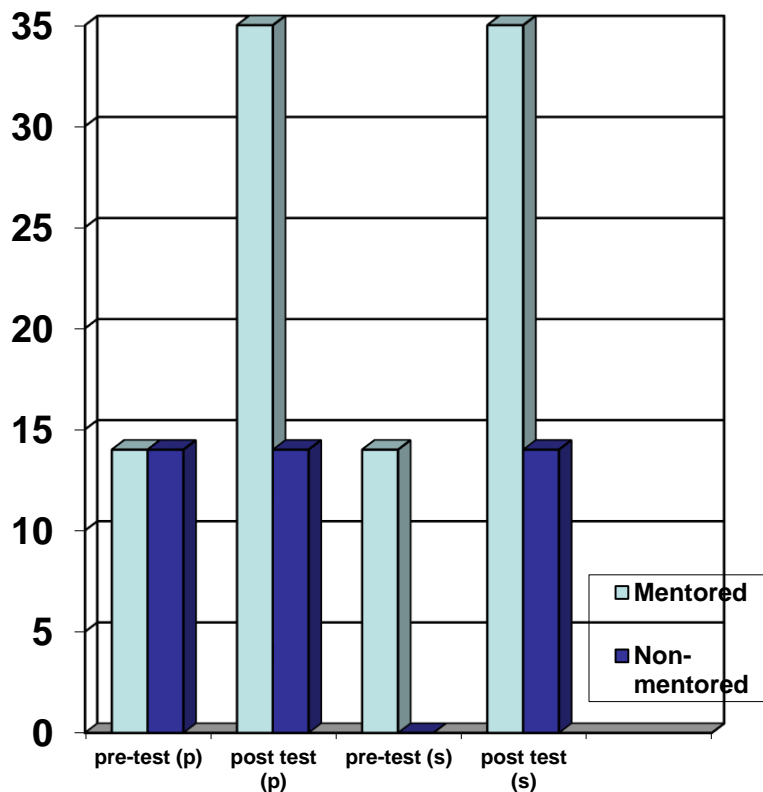
The experimental group in the pre-test category scored 14 points respectively for P and S while the control group scored 14 for P and 0 for S, resulting with a mean of 14 for the experimental group and a mean of 7 for the control group leading to a variance of 7 between the two (14 and 7).

In direct contrast to the pre-test category, the post-test category produced significantly different results. The experimental group scored 35 points for P and S respectively as

opposed to the control group which scored 14 points for P and S respectively with a mean of 35 for the experimental group thus causing a variance of 21 points. The increase of 21 points in the variance is attributable to mentoring. A closer examination of P and S reveals that there is a direct correlation between the two at the pre-test period and the post-test period. Any other than P if substituted has the opposite effect on S, which in turn shows that variable P is a determinant on S.

The experimental groups scored 35 points each for P and S as shown below in the Table 12. The control group scored 14 points each for P and S. The experimental group scored in the pre-test, 14 points each for P and S. The control group scored 14 points for P and 0 point for S. The following Table 12 shows the pre-test and post-test points scored by the experimental and control groups of P and S.

Table 12. Segmented Evaluation Results

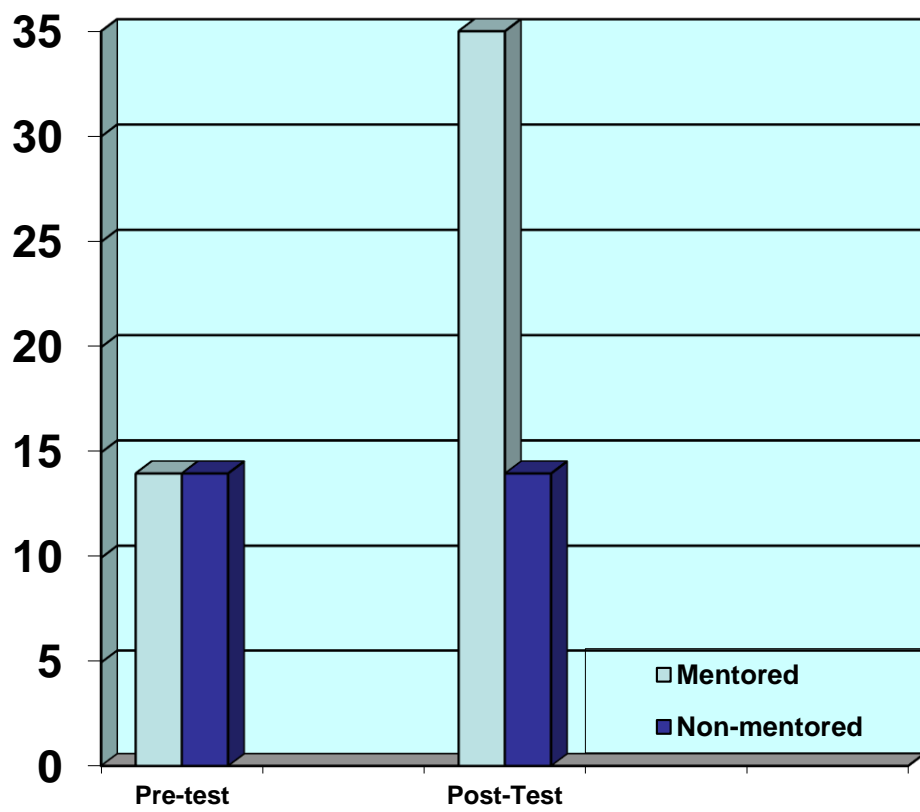


The control group (pre-test) scored 14 points each for P and S as shown above in Table 12.

The experimental group scored (pre-test) 14 points each for P and S. The control group scored 14 points for P and 0 point for S. The experimental group (post-test) scored 35 points each for P and S. Both the variables of P and S scored 35 points each after they had received training and mentoring. They reflect disciples who are willing to take the challenge of personal/team based evangelism coupled with mentoring. Table 12 is connected to diagram 7 (Hexagon Dynamics). The declining church can turnaround and can continue to grow. The dynamics of personal/team-based evangelism coupled with mentoring can positively help to accomplish this goal.

The following Table 13 shows the administrative scores for those mentors who received mentoring as opposed to those mentors who did not receive mentoring.

Table 13. Mentor Evaluation



Average Administrative Evaluation score pre and post mentoring, for mentors who received mentoring versus those who did not, demonstrates a significant point of the value of training/mentoring. Trainers need to be trained. Winning the lost is God's number one job in this fallen world. Therefore, soul-winners need to be effectively trained / mentored to produce the desired results.

This case study method was conducted in the same way as mentioned above, on 42 participants in 6 groups each of which consisted of 7 participants. The total number of participants in all the three churches was 49. It was a demonstration of real people with real experience of training and mentoring to share the gospel successfully. Everyone was excited to share about the power of the gospel and the value of training and mentoring.

The case studies conducted in three churches have produced findings which are very useful for mentors working with or without institutional setting. The mentoring in this study may have its drawback as it is not conclusive. There may be other factors, which may be examined for further research to validate the efficacy of training/mentoring in another setting. It might be also very interesting to assess the impact of training/mentoring in situations where mentoring is absolutely impossible (Example: countries where witnessing is punishable by death). I could not train people (in groups) in some parts of India and Malaysia). Also, traditional institutions (Bible schools, Seminaries etc.) might assess the merit of this type of institutional mentoring in that setting because retention of candidates (in churches) offsets the cost of losing them in the long run.

The following diagram sums up the entire thesis project in a nutshell as to what needs to be done from a practical stand point to turnaround a declining denominational church in

a transitional neighborhood. Theologically, strategically and operationally, Nehemiah was able to rebuild the wall for the glory of God. The declining church, can turnaround as well.

Diagram 13. Vision to build and build to win!

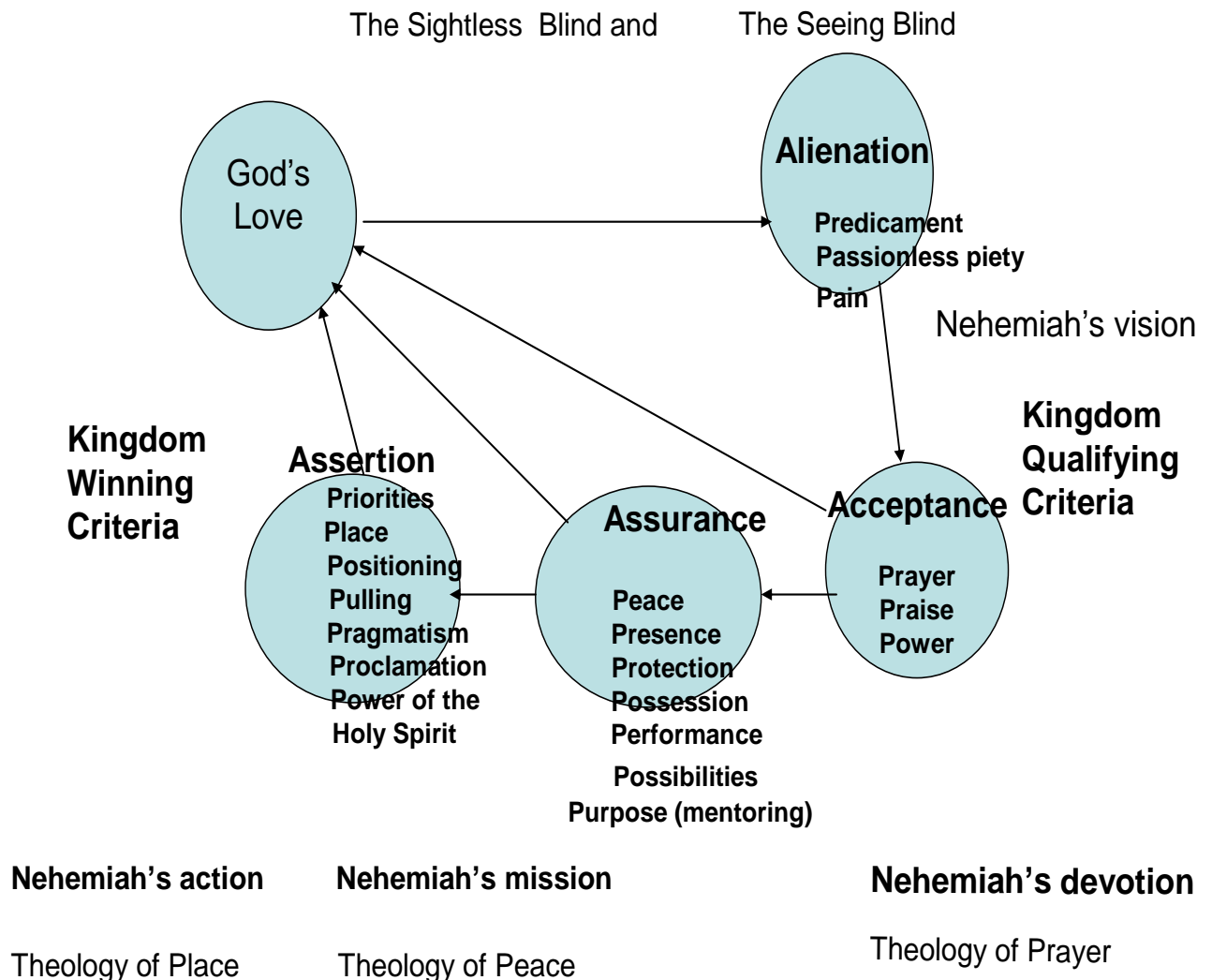


Diagram 13 as shown above is connected to Diagram 5, Diagram 7 (Hexagon Dynamics) and Table 12. Strategic revelation, visionary prayer, leadership learning, proclamation, community connection, team/personal evangelism, and leadership mentoring

are all inter connected. Strategic revelation of God's love is for alienated people. God's love for all mankind is a strategic and leverage point to reach everyone including the Diaspora with the gospel. Visionary prayer brings the message of reconciliation to be received (acceptance). Leadership learning/training/mentoring establishes assurance and enables (kingdom winning criteria) to make proclamation (assertion) to the lost (sightless blind and the seeing blind).

The sightless blind are those people including the Diaspora who are willing to accept God's reconciliation (Strategic Revelation) and turn to God, and to be trained / mentored to become trainers / mentors. It is the kingdom qualifying criteria to be saved and then lead people to Christ. Nehemiah had the strategic revelation to build the wall and bring the message of reconciliation to the alienated people. The seeing blind are those like the Pharisees of Jesus' times who reject the message of reconciliation asserting that they see but they don't. Many people in churches are like the seeing blind. They do not see the need to turn to God. In essence they become more blinded and stay religious like the Pharisees.

The sightless blind and the seeing blind are all people including the Diaspora people, who are alienated from God (John 9: 39; Eph.2:13). God's love is for everyone because of the cross. God's people need to have this strategic revelation of reaching the Diaspora for Christ. God has accepted the entire humanity on the cross. The message of reconciliation is for every one. All are accepted in the Beloved (Eph.1:6) but the offer of acceptance has to be accepted (John 1:12) without which, people are like the seeing blind. Acceptance establishes the kingdom-qualifying criteria and leads to the next stage of assurance (Eph.2:5). All these preliminary steps will establish a soul-winner in the ball park where

he/ she has to win the match (kingdom-winning criteria). The Holy Spirit will help (assertion) the soul-winners and will use them for proclamation (Acts 1:8).

The question arises as to where to start the turnaround process. The following are the divine characteristics/steps to follow by those who follow Christ before they could be trained in personal and / or team based evangelism. If individuals are not disciples in the biblical sense, they can become problems in the system. People perish without the vision because of lack of operational practice. The following are the divine keys for discipleship to practice the vision of Christ to win the lost for Him.

Divine Discipline for Discipleship: Soldiers have to go through the boot camp to be trained well for the army of any nation. God's army has to be trained in the best sense of the word because it is the army of God. This army has to learn to do the truth and apply it in a practical way to relate the message of reconciliation to contextualized social reality. Dr. Douglas Hall points out, "The purpose of systemic theology is to see God's truth in its natural interrelated nature. Reality operates interrelationally; therefore, the more we can perceive theology as interrelated, the more our theology is viewed in away that is compatible with how social reality works and thus the easier it will be to make our theology practical in the real world." ²¹³

Divine submission: The Apostle Paul was a totally submitted disciple of Christ. He was an exemplary model for disciples to follow. Obedience to the call of God and discipleship-training, was the essence of his mission and missionary method to proclaim the message of reconciliation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out, "The call was the Word of God himself, and all that is required was single-minded obedience." ²¹⁴

²¹³ Douglas Hall and Judy Hall, *A Culture of Hope* (Rough Draft; not yet published), 15.

²¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 79.

Divine Energy: The Holy Spirit will not use those who are not submitted to God. Those who are not submitted to God cannot resist the devil. Those who are not disciplined are unaware of the meaning of discipleship. Willing to forsake everything and follow the Lord is the only way for the ambassadors to live a fulfilling life. Historically speaking, great men and women of God like Polycarp, St Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Patrick, St Joan of Arc, Mother Teresa, Bro Lawrence and various others were used by the Holy Spirit to bring the message of Christ's reconciliation to the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer asserts, "The call to follow implies that the only one way of believing on Jesus Christ, and that is by leaving all and going with the incarnate Son of God."²¹⁵ Willingness to live and die for Christ is the mark of a true disciple. Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out, "When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die."²¹⁶ Disciples with divine submission will have divine energy to proclaim with power, to build and build to win. The Holy Spirit gives the divine energy and all can share this energy. Bonhoeffer asserts, "It is even more readily available for us now that he has left the world, because we know that he is glorified, and because the Holy Spirit is with us."²¹⁷

The universal body of Christ with its redemption is a miniature kingdom to reflect the reign of God and therefore, the message of the larger kingdom has to spread only through the church. It is a very demanding task. Bonhoeffer states, "As it follows him beneath the cross, The Church stands before God as the representative of the world."²¹⁸ It can be done with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God can build the life of the community of believers in church as one solid force to be a powerful witness for the kingdom. The

²¹⁵ Ibid, 62.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 89.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 227.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 92.

responsibility of the church is to be open to the work of the Spirit of God, to be effective in its witness for the kingdom.

Recommendation

This research project has been the result of research conducted based on information obtained from three churches which have been used as test cases. Also, data obtained about Mount Pleasant and Providence relating to community analysis was based on the data for the year 2000. More research needs to be done based on the present data. Mount Pleasant has changed significantly in the last two years. Real estate has been on the upward scale raising the cost of buying a home. The cost of an average home has gone up three times than that of five years ago. More immigrants from African countries like Nigeria and Kenya have added to the Diaspora statistics in the past two years.

The Diaspora population of the Hispanics has undergone a very significant change in the last three years. Rigorous control to eliminate illegal immigrants in some parts of the country has resulted in, movement of illegal aliens of the Hispanic origin into Providence and around the neighborhood. Some illegal aliens pretend to act that they do not speak English for fear of being caught and deported. Some Hispanic pastors interviewed were very cautious in making any statements about the illegal immigrants who are living in Mount Pleasant and in the neighborhood.

Hispanics do not feel comfortable in multicultural churches because of language barriers. Mingling with an English speaking congregation is sending shock waves into them even before they walk into a place where English is the spoken language. Hispanics are thriving in number in churches where Spanish is spoken. More than 20 Spanish people whom I have struggled to speak to, are willing to take ESL classes at MPBC this summer.

I will have learned to speak Spanish fluently in two years and with an additional number of Hispanics at MPBC, we as a congregation will be able to see the Hispanic data from a different light. New data of the Hispanics who are here legally will shed new light on the present research. If illegal aliens are accounted for and given asylum in America, the new statistics will give another picture entirely different from what it is now. New research has to be done as empirical research for purposes of statistical, spiritual and social dynamics.

Statistical data of ABC-USA of this year or most recent year may present some minor if not significant changes in the denomination as a whole. Future studies have to be done based on the latest data of the denomination. The projection analysis of the past with the actual analysis of the present has not been done by the denomination. Interviews were complete but not conclusive because of hesitance of people to reveal publicly as opposed to privately, information about the negative loop of the hexagon.

As an inexperienced pastor, I see the negative people in a congregation at MPBC with a straightforward approach to help them, which may give them a misperception of a change happening too suddenly. The Apostle Paul dropped off Mark in his missionary journey because of Mark's inconsistent commitment. Paul and Barnabas had a severe contention over this issue of Mark going with Paul in the missionary journey. Barnabas took Mark and sailed separately since Paul continued to put up a resistance over Mark. Several years later Paul was old and with years of wisdom, he was able to seek Mark to be a part of God's work. Rev. Swensen's wisdom in seeing the negative loop after thirty years of ministry was a reminder of the Apostle Paul's dealing with Mark in later years. It was not helpful in the beginning especially for systems thinking analysis. Swensen looks at people as the Apostle Paul looked at Mark in the end. It appeared to be controversial for

Swensen to get involved in the negative aspects of people definitely because of looking at people with love and not as people for statistical analysis. Some deacons did not want to rock the boat but gave enough information which established the major causes of decline in these churches 30 years ago. General information like power struggle or personality clash may not be enough if specifics are needed. Future studies have to be done in that area as to how to do it specifically.

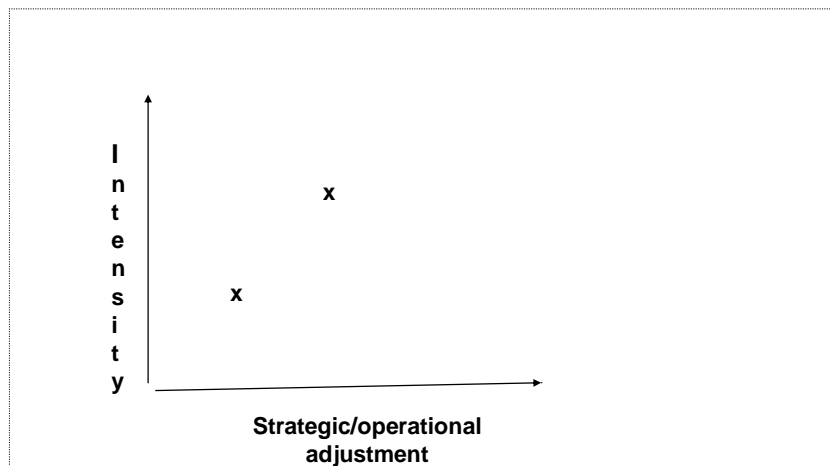
Nehemiah's determination as a leader is commendable. He was determined to straighten out the spirit of control and resist individuals like Eliashib and Tobiah to the point of throwing all the belongings of Tobiah, out of the store rooms of the house of God. Nehemiah was quick to nip it in the bud. He, "contended with the rulers, and said, 'why is the house of God forsaken?' And I gathered them together and set them in their place" (Neh.13:11). Future research has to be done as to how men and women of God are determined to resist people like Tobia who desecrate the house of the Lord. Jesus rebuked the rulers but made His points clear as to why He disagreed with them in the first place. Should not we have to do the same with clarity, love and determination? More research is needed.

Organizational change

Organizationally, the church has not been responding to change as the business firms have done. There are declining churches and changing churches in North America. Most people resist change preferring the certainty of their misery rather than the misery of uncertainty. It is a puzzle for people like Shakespeare's Hamlet. Uncertainty like death for example, "puzzles the will, and makes us rather bear those ills we have, than fly to

others we know not of.”²¹⁹ Also, the boiled frog syndrome as discussed in the beginning of the project guarantees the decline of churches leading to extinction in the long run. Pastor Norman Swensen believes in using one principle at a time until the church gets excited about it and that the principle has a life of its own. Enrollment of children in the Sunday school classes by witnessing in the neighborhood is one of the several ministries to the Diaspora people, which will make a turnaround. This is fundamental before going to the next step which will confuse the system. The intersecting two lines which is marked by the letter, “X” is the equilibrium point. People may feel pressured to do something which will be counter productive in the long run. The organizational change process has to balance between the intensity of the change and the operational/ strategic dynamics of change as shown in the following diagram 14.

Diagram 14. Organizational Change Process



²¹⁹ G. Blackmore Evans Ed., Riverside Shakespeare, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974) Hamlet Act III, i, lines 79-81.

Conclusion

As ministry becomes more global and the demographic shift toward urban centers continue to move at a rapid pace, the church is being forced to confront these transitions. The ability of a church to effectively manage pastoral and / or congregational change often determines the vitality, vibrancy and efficacy of that ministry into the future. Some churches have followed their specific denominational process only to find that the ministry has remained stagnant because of the mismatch between the church vision and the newly installed pastor. Even some non-denominational ministries have found that pastoral leaders remain well established, although their effectiveness in ministry has long passed, preferring to remain in the certainty of their misery.

The message of reconciliation is to all people since God created the entire human race. Shakespeare calls man (humanity) the masterpiece, “What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world; the paragon of animals; and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?”²²⁰ Every human being is created in the image of God to become the beauty of the world. It applies to all people including the Diaspora people. We cannot just appreciate humanity in

²²⁰ Ibid, Act II, ii, lines 303-308.

exaltation on the one hand and on the other hand, ignore the Diaspora people as quintessence of dust.

All saved people can be ambassadors and all ambassadors can minister to all people, including the Diaspora people who in turn can play a vital role in turning around a declining denominational church in a transitional neighborhood. As an ambassador for the Lord God of Israel, Nehemiah not only rebuilt the wall, but also revitalized the people, by turning them back to God. Strategically, theologically and operationally, he accomplished the task because it was God's work. The Christian church is in the partial reign of God. As the organic body of Christ, the church must do His work by becoming ambassadors for Christ and proclaiming to all people, including the Diaspora people, "Be you reconciled to God," until Jesus comes to commence the fullness of His reign. The complete picture, at His coming, of the Garden of God (before the fall), the Household of God (after the fall), and, the City of God and the Temple of God (Kingdom of God) will be fully comprehended from the kingdom perspective.

APPENDIX 1. SAMPLE JOB POSTINGS WITH BILINGUAL REQUIREMENTS

(A) Date: Fri, 22 Sep 2006 19:05:11 -0400
From: RICOMJOB <ricomjob@BROWN.EDU>
Subject: Sales Representatives | Vision Moderna
Job Title: Sales Representatives
Organization: Vision Moderna
Location: Providence
Salary: commissions
Start Date: ASAP
Part Time
Permanent

Job Description

Vision Moderna is a minority owned monthly Latino Magazine that is expanding in the New England Area.

Must be able to interact with clients in inner cities around New England.

Bilingual is a plus

Sales experience, flexible time, excellent personal skills, desire to grow with the company, reliable and honest. Excellent commissions.

How to Apply

Send cover letter and resume to: rdecastillo.vm@gmail.com
Call: 401-575-1634

B) Date: Tue, 26 Sep 2006 23:11:03 -0400
From: RICOMJOB <ricomjob@BROWN.EDU>
Subject: Prevention Specialist | AIDS Care Ocean State

Job Title: Prevention Specialist
Organization: AIDS Care Ocean State
Location: South Providence
Salary: 27k
Start Date: ASAP
Full Time
Permanent

Job Description

Position Type: Regular Full-time, Hourly, Full Benefits

Hours per Week: 40

Brief Description:

- Coordinate HIV prevention street outreach program.
- Focus on HIV testing and syringe exchange.
- Must communicate openly about sex, substance abuse and related topics.
- Must exercise good judgment and work independently.
- Strong communications, organization, documentation and teamwork skills required.
- Must have reliable transportation and valid insurance and license.
- General office computer skills required.
- Some local and national travel required.
- **Bilingual (English/Spanish) required.**

How to Apply

Send resume with salary requirements to triciac@aidscareos.org

APPENDIX 2. AN INTRODUCTION TO PRIMARY & SECONDARY CULTURE

By Dr. Douglas Hall

Primary systems satisfy people's needs through personal relationships. Secondary systems satisfy similar needs through organizational systems in which knowing people personally, is not essential, or through material goods or money. Every culture embodies both primary and secondary aspects of need satisfaction. Simplistically, we could say that a tribal culture tends to be dominated by primary concerns and an industrial system by secondary concerns. Also, the elite of every culture tend to operate in mainly secondary ways, while the lower classes tend to operate in more primary ways. The following suggests further ways in which these two systems may be contrasted:

| PRIMARY | SECONDARY |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dominated by oral communication.• History is taught and preserved in chiefly oral ways.• Families are typically extended or joint families.• This system produces and preserves relational systems.• In a dominantly primary culture, survival of an individual apart from the relational system is very difficult, and not normative.• Spiritual and even mystical explanations of reality are common. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dominated by written, mechanical, or electronic communication.• History is often preserved in written forms, or by some other media.• Families tend to be nuclear or fragmented family systems.• This system produces increasingly refined material products.• Survival in a dominantly secondary culture is possible without relationships, provided the individual is integrated into the secondary systems for personal need-satisfaction.• Scientific, objective, cognitive explanations of reality tend to be common. |

- Art, music, drama and stories, dance, modeling, etc. are important communicators of culture and **information**.
- Most **information** is taught and transferred in cognitive ways, often in formal classroom environments.

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 Publication number: M90-002
 July 1990
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APPENDIX 3. EVALUATION FORM

Thank you very much for your kindness in answering the following questions to help me in my quest to do the very best in serving God as a pastor for the growth of His Church! Can you grade on a scale of 1-10 on the emphasis placed on the following which resulted in the growth of your congregation? You can circle the number (1 as the lowest for 10% of emphasis placed and the grade is .35, 2 =.7 for 20% emphasis, 3 =1.05 for 30% emphasis, 4 =1.4 for 40% emphasis, 5 =1.75 for 50% emphasis, 6 =2.1 for 60% emphasis, 7 =2.45 for 70% of emphasis, 8 =2.8 for 80% of emphasis, 9 =3.15 for 90% of emphasis and 10 is the highest 3.5 for 100 % emphasis). The highest score for all 10 questions is 35 (10x3.5)

- 1) On the Name of Jesus
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 2) On the Word of God
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 3) On the Holy Spirit
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 4) On Prayer
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 5) Unity
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 6) Humility and sincerity
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- 7) Courage not to give up
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8) Responsibility to give time, tithe etc. for the Kingdom work

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

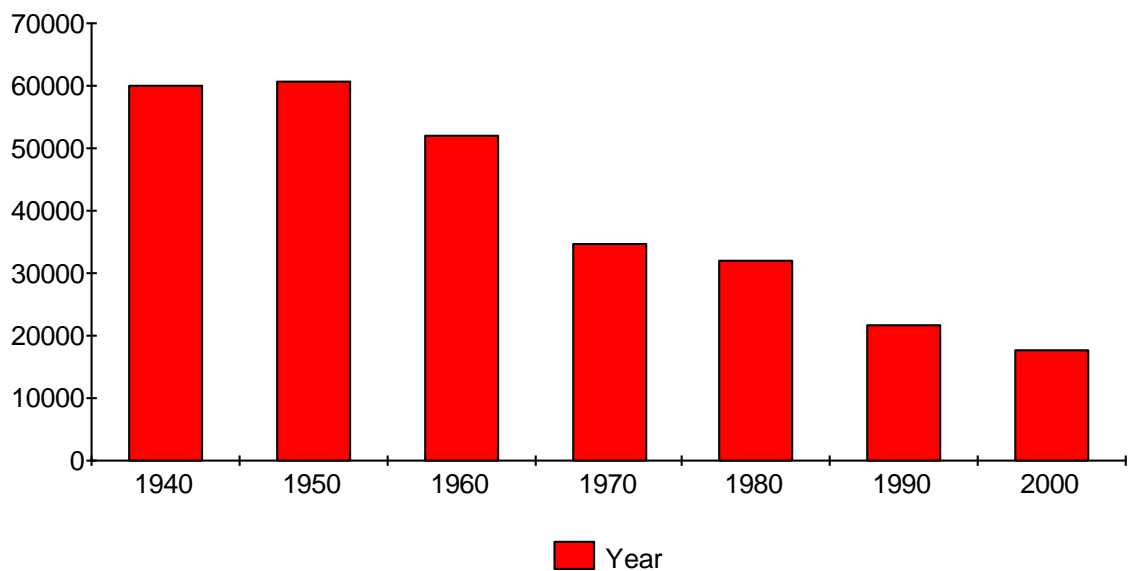
9) Vision of the Kingdom of God

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10) Training and Mentoring

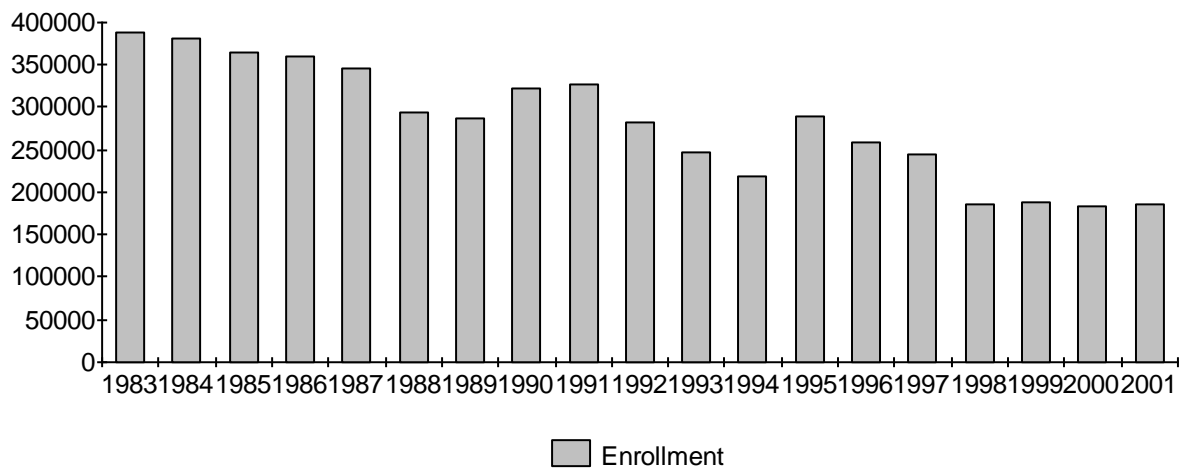
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

APPENDIX 4. ABC/USA BAPTISM



Source: ABC/USA

APPENDIX 5. CHURCH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, ABC/USA



Source: ABC/USA

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VITA

The author of this work is Paul Lawrence. He was born in India and graduated from St. Joseph's College, Madras University, India with a Master's Degree in English Language and Literature. He taught English at the Under Graduate level in India for 7 years. In 1994, he graduated from Bryant University, Smithfield, RI with an MBA in Management. As an Adjunct Professor of Management, he taught Management courses at Bryant University at the Under Graduate level for 3 years. Through attending Zion Bible College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, he received an M. Div. equivalency. He attended the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary from June 2004 to May 2007. This project is presented in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His studies will be completed by May 11, 2007. He was converted to Christ in 1966 after seeing a totally blind man receive his sight in a Gospel crusade immediately after receiving Christ. This challenged his belief in Buddhism and agnosticism. He encountered Christ the next morning and was gloriously saved. He has traveled around the world to proclaim the message of the cross in colleges, churches, public meetings and on the television programs. Led by the Spirit, he has presented the message of reconciliation in many cities of the world in the past 27 years and brought more than 3000 people to Christ on a one on one basis.

Paul lives with his wife Janet at Mount Pleasant, Providence, RI. He was ordained by the ABC/USA in 2005. He has been the Pastor of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Providence, RI since November 2004. Also, he has been an Adjunct Professor of Management at Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, MA since 1999.

